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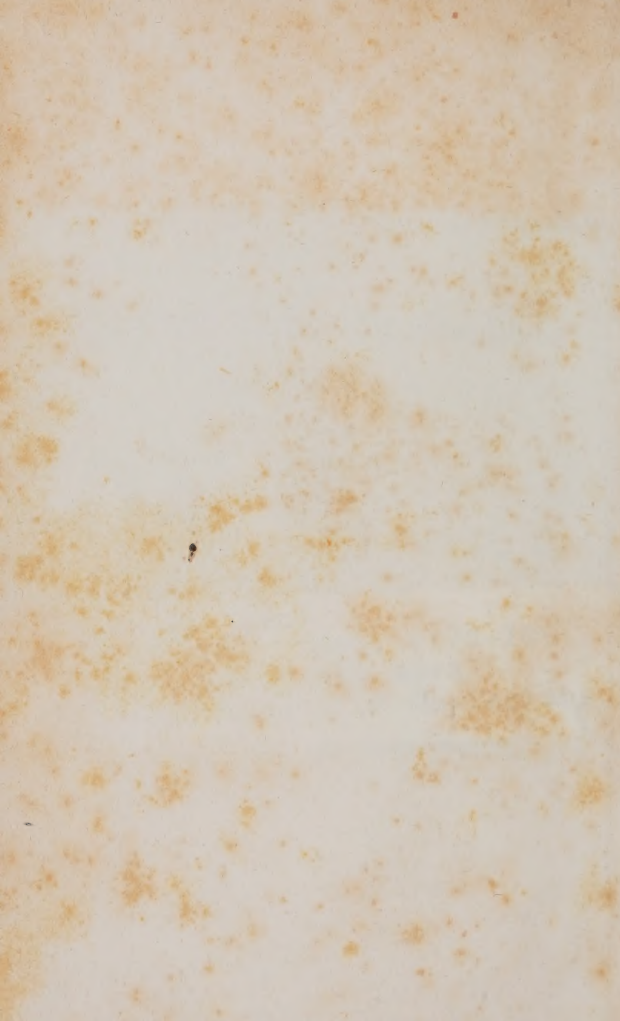
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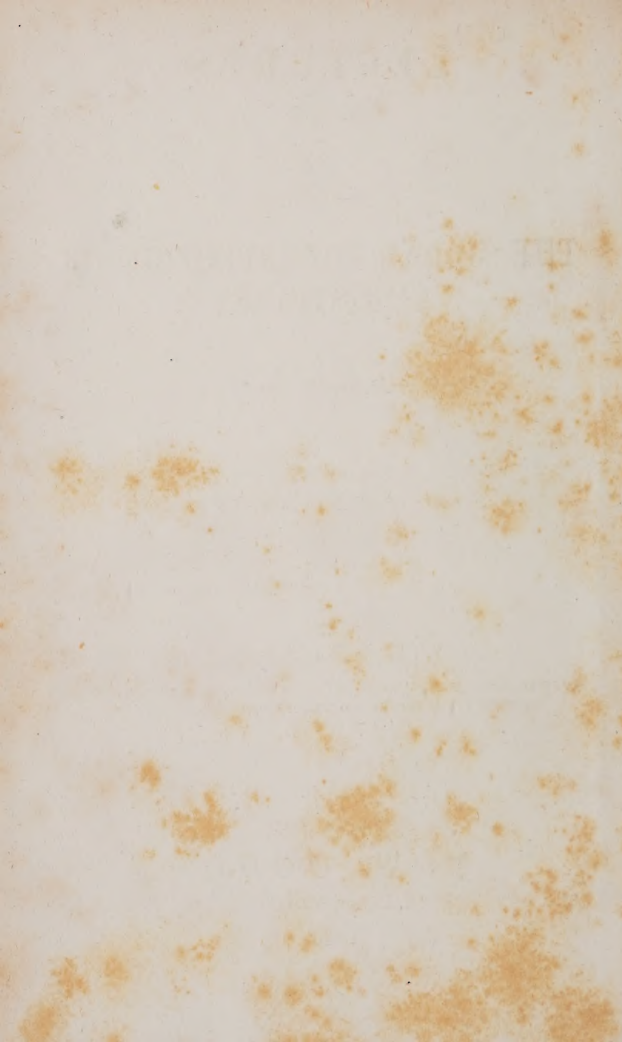




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# LECTURES

ON

## THE MORAL IMPERFECTION OF CHRISTIANS;

DESIGNED TO SHOW,

THAT WHILE SINLESS PERFECTION IS OBLIGATORY  
ON ALL, IT IS ATTAINED BY NONE.

✓  
BY

SETH WILLISTON,

AUTHOR OF THE HARMONY OF DIVINE TRUTH, A VINDICATION  
OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE REFORMATION, ETC.

NEW-YORK:

M. W. DODD,

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## P R E F A C E .

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SHOULD a Perfectionist take up this book and read its title-page, it is not improbable he will say in his heart, The author had been better employed in an effort to raise the Church from its present Laodiceanism to our high standard, than in seeking to bring us down to the common level. But what is there in the title of his book which should subject the author to the suspicion of being unfriendly to sanctification, even in its greatest extent? True, it is asserted on the title-page, that sinless perfection is attained by *none*. Does this amount to proof that it is the object of his book to hinder Christians from growing in grace? If you were to see men contending in a race, who thought they had reached the terminating point, when you knew that they had much ground yet to pass over, would it not be kind in you to apprise them of their mistake? Your doing so could give them no reason to say that you were wishing to impede them in their race. Is it any proof that we do not wish men to be holy, even to perfection, because we do not believe they are so already?

But how how do you know, the Perfectionist may say, that I am not perfectly holy? Do not I know the exercises of my

own heart better than you do? I would remind him that there is one who knows the exercises of our hearts better than we do ourselves. And so much of his knowledge of the hearts of my fellow-men, as he has seen fit to reveal, may become *my knowledge* of their hearts. By a divine revelation I am made acquainted with the nature of that heart which is found in every unregenerate man. If one of this class of men should say, "You cannot discern the exercises of my heart; what right then have you to declare before the world that I am an enemy to my Maker? I own myself to be an unconverted man; but I am no enemy to my God." My reply to such a one would be: The Searcher of all hearts has caused it to be noted in the Scripture of truth, that the carnal mind (which is the mind of every unrenewed man) is enmity against God. It is in no other way than this that we pretend to know what is their state of heart, who lay claim to a perfect sanctification. If God has said nothing in his word to invalidate this claim, it does not become me to excite any suspicion concerning their sincerity; for their hearts are out of my sight. But if God has uttered a decision on this point, and caused it to be put on record: That none of his children during their sojourn upon earth do good without also doing evil—that none of them can say that they have made their heart clean, so as to be pure from their sin; then have we a right to say of him who claims to be absolutely free from sin, that he deceiveth himself and the truth is not in him.

Perfectionism, if an error, is one which is approached by an assailant with peculiar difficulty; not because the Scrip-

tures do not furnish us with arguments to expose it ; but because it claims for its votaries that they are far ahead of the whole Church—not only in the correctness of their creed, but in *the great purity of their lives*. Every attack made upon their system will be considered by them as so much opposition to pre-eminent holiness.

I think my conscience bears me witness that in delivering these Lectures and in preparing them for the press, my object has not been to check the progress of holiness in this world of sin. I am none afraid that the salt of the earth will have too much savor in it ; or that the light of the world will have too much lustre. Often do I feel impelled, according to Paul's direction to the Ephesians, to make *supplication for all saints* : and their greater sanctification I feel constrained to make the burthen of my prayer. I think I am not displeased with my brethren whom I perceive to be in advance of me in godliness and usefulness ; but in honor I would prefer them.

All which God does among the children of Adam to recover them from sin to holiness is worthy of eternal praise. Revivals of religion, effected by the pouring out of his Spirit, are a blessing infinite. Wo to that man who speaketh a word against the work of the Holy Ghost in the renovation and sanctification of sinful hearts. He has reason to fear that he will never have forgiveness. But why should we desire God to pour out his Spirit ? Is it merely to rescue sinful men from a state of danger ? Shall we care about nothing except their conversion, and feel indifferent about their sanctification ? The sanctification which is carried on in the hearts of believers by the

Spirit of God, is a desirable and glorious work. It is regeneration protracted ; and without such protraction, regeneration would itself be valueless. A Church that is made up of converts, whose religious feelings all die away with the excitement which brings them within its pale, may appear formidable in its numbers ; but is in reality weaker than it was before such an accession. Without a progressive sanctification, no Church can be lovely or prosperous.

Why then, it may be said, if you consider sanctification so essential to the beauty and strength of the Church, do you not fall in with the Perfectionists, who are pleading the cause of a finished salvation ? Just for the same reason, I would say, that my desire for the conversion of sinners, does not make me fall in with every thing which comes up under the name of a revival of religion. A revival may be such a delusive thing, as to prove one of the greatest calamities with which the Church is visited. The same may be true of a claim to extraordinary sanctification. I would be very loth to do any thing to obstruct the Church, or any of its branches, from the most rapid advancement in holiness. But when any assert that they have already reached the mark of perfection, the word of God, as I have always understood it, bids us beware of them—not for fear we shall have too much religion ; but rather for fear that we shall trust in a religion which will eventually undermine the cause of truth and holiness. My reasons for being afraid of the character of that religion which lays a claim to sinlessness, will appear in the subsequent work.



The reader will not find these Lectures written in much of a polemic style. While writing them I had nothing from the pen of my opponents lying before me. The first five Lectures were delivered in a consecutive order: but the seven others were delivered at different times and on different occasions. Though these last are not as entirely restricted to the subject of the moral imperfection of Christians, as the others, they have more or less of a bearing upon that subject, and are adapted, as I hope, to promote the godly edifying of Christians: I have therefore thought proper to throw them into the same volume. Let me solicit the Christian reader to unite his prayers with those of the author, that the little work, which he is now about to read, may exert some influence in promoting the cause of truth and holiness in this age of error and declension.



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## LECTURE I.

THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE DOCTRINE  
OF THE MORAL IMPERFECTION OF CHRISTIANS EX-  
AMINED AND ANSWERED.

For what saith the Scripture?—ROM. 4: 3.

THIS question implies that the Scripture is the arbiter to settle every theological dispute. For the Scripture to decide any matter, is the same as for God himself to do it; for “all scripture is given by inspiration of God.” I have taken this passage for my text without any regard to its particular connection; for instead of inquiring what the Scripture says on the doctrine of justification, which is the subject the apostle had under his eye, I propose to inquire what it says on the kindred doctrine of sanctification, particularly as to the degree in which it is attained in the present life. Does the Scripture teach that there are any, who in *this life* attain to such a degree of sanctification as to be sinless characters? Do any of the saints, while they remain on earth, arrive at such a state, as to *do* nothing wrong, and *speak* nothing wrong—at such a state, as to have *no unholy affections*; or, which is the same, as to be influenced by no selfish motives? Do they ever so live a



single day, that there is nothing either in their external conduct, or in the inward frame of their heart, to make new work for repentance? From what attention I have paid to the Bible in relation to this subject, I am convinced that no such saints are to be found on the earth at the present period; and that none of this character have lived in the former, or will live in the future periods of time.

I am aware that the opposite side of the question has its advocates. And at the present day some of them are urging forward their peculiar sentiments, as though the revival of piety in the church, and the salvation of immortal souls, depended on their sentiments being received. Among those who view their doctrine as erroneous, there may be some who imagine the error to be so harmless as to call for no rebuke. To me it has appeared quite otherwise; for though their doctrine would seem as if remarkably calculated to advance the cause of holiness, I am persuaded that its ultimate influence will be altogether the reverse.

There is a sect denominated Perfectionists, who, as I believe, profess to be universally and also uniformly free from sin. But they have gone to such extremes in carrying out their sentiments, that their folly is manifest to all men. There is another class of Perfectionists, some of whom are found in different denominations of Christians, who profess to have no sympathy with the sect alluded to, and yet agree with them in believing that sinless perfection is not only attainable, but that it is actually attained by some in the present life. This latter class are the

ones on whom my eye will be more particularly fixed while I am investigating this subject. But as I consider both classes to occupy so much common ground as to make use of many of the same arguments to support their respective systems of perfectionism, and to oppose the doctrine of Christian imperfection, they will both claim a degree of my attention.

Before I proceed to those scriptural arguments which, in my view, serve to prove that none of the saints attain to sinless perfection in the present life, I shall notice a few of the most prominent arguments which are made use of on the other side of the question.

First. It is said, that nothing short of sinless perfection comes up to the divine requirements. I am not disposed to dispute this extent of the divine requirements. When God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," I believe that true holiness, and a perfection of it, is required. So when the Savior says, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." I believe that all God's other commands, as well as those which explicitly enjoin perfection, are to be understood as going to the same extent. His command requiring us to repent, lays us under obligation not only to exercise some degree of contrition for sin, but to be perfectly contrite. So his command, that we should believe on his Son, requires that our heart should be full of faith, without any mixture of unbelief. As the Moral Governor of the universe, God can enact no laws which do not require his creatures to be perfect. His laws must require as perfect holiness of one creature as of another;

as perfect holiness of men as of angels; as perfect holiness of saints on earth as of saints in heaven: and I may add, as perfect holiness of sinners as of saints.

But this argument, if it prove any thing, proves too much for that class of Perfectionists with whom we are more particularly contending: for if we have a right to infer that some saints have arrived, or will arrive at a state of perfection, from the fact, that God requires this much of them, why have we not a right to infer the same concerning their whole number, from the fact, that the requirement extends to them all? I do not see how we can prove that the children of God will, at some period subsequent to their conversion, arrive at a state of sinless perfection, from the circumstance, that such perfection is required of them; any more than we can prove (according to the doctrine of the other sect of Perfectionists) that they all become sinless characters as soon as they are born into the kingdom; for surely the divine requirement reaches as far back as this. I am not able to see how the mere extent of God's requirements can furnish an argument in favor of the perfection of *some* saints, without furnishing an equally cogent argument in favor of the perfection of *all* saints; and indeed in favor of the perfection of all his accountable creatures, not excepting those who are in the dark world of hell.

It will be said, that if sinless perfection were not attainable, God would not require it. I grant that God does not make his requirements exceed our natural ability. He does not require the use of any

bodily sense or member, which he has not given us. Nor does he require us to perform any such act by these members, as shall transcend their capability. It is also true, that God requires of us no mental act which shall transcend the power of the mental faculties. To love the Lord our God with all the heart and understanding, and strength, is the whole of God's requirement. But he requires creatures possessing an unholy character to become holy, as much as he requires holy creatures to retain their character. God does not consider a rebellious heart as affording any sufficient reason for our refusing to be reconciled to him. Nor does he consider any remaining disaffection in the hearts of his children, as constituting a good reason why their reconciliation should not immediately become perfect.

There is a sense wherein a thing may be attainable, which is not now, and perhaps never will be attained. An interest in the Savior is attainable by all who are within the sound of the gospel. If it were not so, they would not be required to come to him for life. But though an interest in Christ is attainable by all, it is actually attained by comparatively a small number : and these would never have attained it, had it not been for the gracious drawing of the Father. If the command of God is proof that the thing commanded is attainable, and if the attainableness of the thing is proof that some will certainly attain it, we might prove that some sinners would repent of course, because God commands all men every where to repent. But as sinners never employ their

faculties for the exercise of repentance, until they are brought to it by the grace of God, so it is with saints; they never rise any higher in their holy affections than they are raised by the same grace which quickened them when they were dead in trespasses and sins.

Secondly. It is said, God has not only required perfection, but has signified his purpose to effect it: "This is the will of God, even your perfection." 1 Thess. 4: 3. This expression, "the will of God," is more commonly used to denote what God requires or delights in, rather than what he designs to accomplish. In this sense, some things are said to be in accordance with the will of God which never take place, and other things take place, which are repugnant to his will. It is asserted that God *will* have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth: and yet all men are not saved. It is certain that God afflicts us. Yet there is a sense in which he does not will to do it; "for he doth not afflict *willingly*, nor grieve the children of men." 1 Tim. 2: 4. Lam. 3: 33. So far as the obligation of man, or God's complacence in man's character are concerned, it is in accordance with the will of God that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. And in this twofold sense; namely, in relation to human obligation and divine complacence, it is the will of God that the saints should be sinlessly perfect, without the least delay; not a few of them alone, but their whole number. Yet this furnishes no proof that they will all, or even



any of them, forthwith come to such a sinless state. Nor does it furnish proof that they will come to it in some later period of their pilgrimage.

If the phrase, "the will of God," as it is used in the passage under consideration, means his *purpose*, it proves that the sanctification of believers is an event which may be expected with great certainty. Whatever this declaration of the apostle proved in relation to the work of sanctification among the saints of that church, which he was then addressing, it proves in relation to the saints of every other church. But it will not be adduced as proof of the perfect sanctification of *all* the saints, either in that or any other church, ancient or modern; how then does it amount to proof of this high degree of sanctification in relation to *any* of them? It is doubtless in accordance with the purposing, as well as the preceptive will of God, that all such as are born of his Spirit, shall hereafter attain to perfect holiness. His preceptive will enjoins its attainment even now; but he may have wise reasons for bringing them along by degrees to that entire subjection to his will, which is their present duty. His command to the children of Israel was, to exterminate the wicked inhabitants of Canaan at once. It was their duty so to have done. And yet we learn that God had wise reasons for determining that some of these wicked Canaanites should be left in the land. Ex. 23: 29, 30. Judg. 3: 1.

Let proof be exhibited that it is the will of God, in the sense of a purpose of his heart, to finish the work of sanctifying his people, or any portion of their num-

ber, while they continue to be dwellers on the earth, and I shall rest satisfied that it will be done : for with God nothing is impossible ; and he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. But if there is no passage of his word which discloses such a purpose, (and if there be such a passage I know not where it is,) who shall dare to assert that such a case ever has, or ever will occur while the world standeth ?

Thirdly. It is thought by some that the actual attainment of sinless perfection may be safely inferred from the circumstance, that some of the approved prayers of the Scriptures are fraught with petitions for such perfection. 2 Cor. 13 : 7. 1 Thess. 5 : 23. This argument is more specious than solid. Devout men are wont to express in prayer all the holy desires which arise in their hearts. They are in the habit of praying for those blessings which are distant, as well as those which are near at hand. Through all their life they are praying to be sustained in a dying hour, and afterward received up to glory. The saints who lived two or three thousand years ago, as well as ourselves, prayed for the hastening on of that prosperous period of the church which is now denominated the Millennium. But neither their prayers nor ours have as yet been answered by the bursting forth of millennial glory. Ps. 72 : 19. Isa. 62 : 6, 7. But these prayers will all be answered, and that in the best time : for it is written, "I the Lord will hasten it in his time." Isa. 60 : 22.

The prayers which Christians make for their own

and others' entire sanctification, are answered, in part, by a sanctification which progresses through life, though it never becomes entire until its close; and at the close of life they are answered in full by a sanctification which has no defect. As they open their mouth wider and wider, their supplies of grace become more abundant; and all the desires which they now pour out before God for a more perfect sanctification, will help to procure for them the eternal and unchangeable perfection of the world of glory.

But here it will be said, Can we ask of God the immediate enjoyment of any blessing, unless we believe that he can, with consistency, immediately bestow it? To this I answer: The Son of God asked his Father to remove the cup of trembling, when he knew that it was a divine appointment that he should drink it to the very bottom. Yet in this solemn crisis it was a relief to his holy soul, to pour out his sorrows into his Father's bosom in the way of prayer. But with the same breath that he prayed for the removal of the cup, he submitted to drink it. Paul not only desired, but prayed for the salvation of the nation of Israel: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." If it was their duty to believe and be saved, it was his duty to desire they might believe and be saved. If it was proper for him to cherish such a desire in his heart, was it not proper that he should express that desire to God? And how should he do it, except in prayer? It is the manner of God's children to pour out their heart before him. They love to express to him all

their hunger and thirst after righteousness; all their desires for a perfect conformity to his image, and for an uninterrupted enjoyment of the light of his countenance; even though it may not be consistent for him immediately to gratify these desires to the full. As the apostle prayed for all his nation that they might become the disciples of Christ, though he had no reason, either from the promises or providences of God, to believe they would all be converted, so he prayed for those who had been converted, that they might become perfect Christians, though he had no reason to expect they would attain to this, until the time should come for them to be received to the world of perfection.

To the Corinthians Paul says, This also we wish, even your perfection: and in harmony with this he says, "Now I pray God that ye do no evil." It is, in my opinion, as consistent to pray for perfection, as to wish for it: and this is as consistent as that God should require it. And of the consistency of his requirement there can be no doubt. But as God's requiring us to be perfect amounts to no proof of our perfection, so neither does our wishing and praying for it, prove that we have already attained to such a state, or that we shall attain to it while we tabernacle in the flesh.

Some may say, If you do not expect the blessing which you ask of God, your prayer is sin; since the Scripture has declared that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Rom. 14: 23. In answer to this objection I need merely to say, that the scripture referred to will be seen, when examined in the light of its con-

text, to have no application to such a subject as that which is now before us.

Fourthly. In support of the doctrine of sinless perfection it is said, that the Scriptures speak of it as a thing which has an actual existence. It is urged, that the saints are often spoken of as *perfect* men; that some of them are described as seeking the Lord with their *whole heart*, and others as following him *wholly*, and others as living a *blameless* life.

Now I will grant, in case it can be shown from the Scriptures, that any mere man since the fall has in this life perfectly kept the commandments of God, so as not to break them in thought, word, or deed, the truth of the doctrine of sinless perfection is established. For if there is an individual believer who has come up to this degree of sanctification, another may attain to it, and another, until every believer on earth has become a sinless character. But I have carefully looked at the texts which are depended on for proof of the actual existence of sinless characters in our apostate world, and I am convinced that when they are examined in connection with their several contexts, as well as in connection with the whole inspired volume, it will be seen that they constitute no substantial proof of the existence of such perfection. Noah and Job are declared to be perfect men, and yet the Scripture records the faults of both of them. The perfect man, in Scripture language, is commonly, if not invariably, the contrast of the wicked man, the graceless sinner; not of the imperfect saint. So it is in the following passages: "Behold God will not cast away a *perfect* man, neither will he help the *evil*

*doers.*" "This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the *perfect* and the *wicked*." "Mark the *perfect* man,—for the end of that man is peace: but the *transgressors* shall be destroyed together, the end of the *wicked* shall be cut off." "The righteousness of the *perfect* shall direct his way; but the *wicked* shall fall by his own wickedness." Job 8: 20, and 9: 22. Ps. 37: 37, 38. Prov. 11: 5.

To want a *perfect* heart, according to Scripture dialect, is the same as to want a *good* heart. It implies an entire destitution of grace. When it is testified concerning Amaziah, one of the kings of Judah, that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart," it evidently means that his right external actions were not done with a right heart. What is alleged against him could not be, that he fell short of sinless perfection; since as much as this was true of all his predecessors on the throne, not excepting the most pious of them.

As soon as the transforming work of the Holy Spirit has passed upon the mind of a sinner, he is honored by being called a perfect man. In the second chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, he calls all such perfect as were spiritual, in distinction from natural men: "Howbeit, we speak wisdom among them that are perfect." This was as much as to say, The Gospel we preach, which is foolishness to natural men, is the height of wisdom to them that have a renovated mind, and, of course, a spiritual discernment. In more passages than one the epithet *perfect* is so connected with that of *up-*

*right*, as to render it certain that every upright man is denominated perfect. Ps. 37: 37. Prov. 2: 21.

Now if the Scriptures have honored the whole company of the regenerate by calling them *perfect*, when it is acknowledged that only a small part of them have attained to a sinless purity, I think it must be evident that something is possessed in common by them all which entitles them to this honor. If this honor is conferred on the children of God of every moral stature, it can certainly amount to no proof that Noah, or Job, or Paul, or any other saint, of whom the Scriptures make mention, was free from all sin, merely because in these sacred writings he is denominated perfect.

Should any inquire why the term *perfect* is applied to men whose sanctification is still imperfect, they ought to know there must be some good reason for it; else the Holy Ghost would never have moved the penmen of the Scriptures to make such a use of the term. Our attainments in divine knowledge are scanty, yet I think we can discover good reasons for their using this term to distinguish the subjects of grace from other men. 1. The word *perfect* serves to describe the excellency of their renovated nature. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor. The saints are the excellent of the earth. They are said to be partakers of the divine nature. There is nothing in the universe more excellent than this divine nature, which God communicates to his children. It is this which renders it suitable that Zion should be called the perfection of beauty, even while much of her deformity still remains. 2. There is a propriety in denomi-

nating the subjects of grace perfect, because all the parts of a finished character are found in them, and because there is a pleasing symmetry between the parts. An infant, which has all the parts of a man, is denominated perfect as soon as it is born, as soon as it is perceived to be a proper child. Even the young Christian has repentance and faith and every grace of the Spirit; also he has respect unto all God's commandments. 3. Perfection, in the most unlimited sense, may be prospectively applied to all such as have had the image of God restored to their hearts; for the commencement of this good work secures its completion. Paul, in pressing to the mark of perfection, was seeking nothing more than to apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. Phil. 3: 12. This seems to be one reason why it is proper, even from the commencement of the religious course of a Christian, to speak of him as a perfect man.

But while the men of grace are still in their pilgrimage, though the Scriptures denominate them perfect, they nevertheless give clear intimations that their perfection is counteracted by something of a contrary nature, and that it differs widely from that perfection to which they will be brought at the close of their probation. You all remember that while the Lord declared his servant Job to be a perfect man, he himself disclaimed all pretension to perfection, that is, to any such perfection as should exclude blame. Paul had prepared his Philippian brethren to understand him to make no claim to a sinless perfection, when he said to them, "Let us therefore, as many



as be perfect, be thus minded ;” for he had just before made this avowal in relation to himself ; “ Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” See Job 1 : 8 and 9 : 20. Phil. 3 : 12, 15.

In accordance with what I have shown to be the use of the word perfect, I would now remark, that it is true in relation to all the distinctive names, by which the Scriptures separate the precious from the vile, that they are names of perfection. There is no mixed name used to distinguish the children of God from the children of the wicked one. They are called *saints*, or holy ones, the others are called *sinners* ; they are called *righteous*, the others *wicked* ; they are called *godly*, and the others *ungodly* ; and so on. These names describe nothing but their renovated part, or that excellency of character which makes them differ from other men. They give us no intimation that there is any defect in them. Yet it is conceded by our opponents, that some defect is attributable to the greater part of those whom the Scriptures have denominated saints, righteous, godly, and the like.

But while the Scriptures honor the children of the kingdom by giving them new names, and such as express no taint of corruption, let it be remembered that they sometimes apply to them their old names, to remind them that their native depravity is not wholly removed. Peter confesses, “ I am a sinful man, O Lord ;” the publican cries, “ God be merciful to me a sinner ;” Paul cries out, “ The law is spiritual, but I am carnal.”

As the Scriptures make use of names which are expressive of nothing but goodness, to designate

men who are confessedly imperfect in goodness, so they often describe their actions by words which imply no mixture of sin. They describe them as seeking the Lord and turning to him with the *whole* heart and with *all* the heart, when it is manifest that their object in using this emphatic language, is not to contrast these actions with those of imperfect saints, but with those of graceless sinners. As in this passage: "And yet for all this, her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned to me with her *whole heart*, but *feignedly*, saith the Lord." Jer. 3: 10. See also 1 Kin. 14: 8 compared with 2 Kin. 10: 31. 2 Chron. 22: 9. Jer. 24: 7.

You all remember what a marked difference Moses makes in the description he gives of the ten men whom he sent to spy out the land of Canaan. In his narrative, Caleb and Joshua are distinguished from the other ten, by its being said of them, that they *wholly* followed the Lord. Does this mean that the other ten followed him in part? No. The contrast between the two and the ten, is not a contrast between strong and weak faith, but between faith and unbelief, between piety and impiety, holiness and sin.

We know it is said of Zacharias and Elisabeth that they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord *blameless*. But this amounts to no proof that they were immaculate. If it did, we could prove that all the subjects of grace were so: for without distinction they are described as keeping God's testimonies—as seeking him with the whole heart, and as doing no iniquity. Ps. 119: 2, 3. John, in his first epistle, makes a strong assertion, which he applies to

every regenerated soul. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." From this passage we are led to conclude that there is a sense in which every true convert, though imperfectly sanctified, does not commit sin. His heart is renewed and his life is reformed. While in his heart there is a great conflict between holiness and sin, his external conduct may be very uniformly on the side of holiness. Paul taught the Galatian Christians that they had within them two natures, flesh and spirit, conflicting with each other: but he gave them reason to hope, that they might so walk in the Spirit as to prevent them from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Christians do, in a good degree, live a blameless life while they are conscious of much blameworthiness in His sight who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins. They feel ashamed of that pride which rises in their heart, even when it does not show itself in any proud action or expression. They may have a spirit of revenge arise in their heart, and for this they feel guilty before God, though they may not discontinue their kind treatment of their enemies. They do not by any means feel innocent in possessing a prayerless spirit, even when it does not cause them to intermit the duties of the closet, of the family or the prayer meeting. If Christians had no control over the lustings of the flesh against the spirit, to prevent their being developed in external actions, their influence in promoting the cause of holiness would be greatly diminished.

Paul's declaration concerning himself (Gal. 2: 20) has been thought by some to amount to a claim to an entire sanctification: "I am crucified with Christ:

nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," &c. But, I ask, has not every regenerated sinner undergone a crucifixion of the old man? By means of this crucifixion has not a new life sprung up in his soul? And is not this new life in every other Christian, as it was in Paul, sustained by Christ's living in him by a gracious influence, and by his living on Christ by virtue of a holy faith?

Fifthly. While those who advocate the doctrine of sinless perfection, concede that such perfection was not attained under the Old Testament, they assert that its attainment is foretold and promised under the New. Such a prediction or promise they think they discover in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, which is quoted in the eighth of Hebrews. It is true that in this prophecy God promises to make a new covenant with his people—not according to the covenant he made with their fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant they brake, though he, on his part, was an husband to them. But he promises, at the time which is here predicted, to write his law in their hearts, and to be a God to them, and cause them to be his people; so that all shall know him from the least unto the greatest.

This promise, as it stands in the prophet, and as it is applied by the apostle, seems intended to teach, (1.) That under the Gospel there would be a new dispensation of the covenant of grace, in which the ceremonies of the Old Testament should be laid aside, without effecting any essential change in its gracious character. It was only in relation to its types that it

decayed, waxed old, and finally vanished away. Heb. 8: 13. (2.) It was also intended to teach, that under the new dispensation, especially in the time of the latter day of glory, there would be such a great increase of piety, that Israelites in name would more universally be Israelites indeed. But I discover nothing in the passage, as it stands in the Old Testament, or as it is applied in the New, which authorizes us to infer that between the two dispensations there exists that difference which is made by imperfect and perfect sanctification. It is clear, these passages authorize us to expect, that under the New Testament there would be an augmentation of the number of true believers, and also of the degree of their piety. But what is there in these, or any other passages in the Bible, to assure us that the saints of the New Testament, in distinction from those of the Old, shall arrive at a state of immaculate perfection? Is it this, that God promises to write his law in their hearts? And did he not do as much as this for the saints of the Old Testament? Or is it because he promises that he will be their God, and that they shall be his people? Is the perpetuity of grace peculiar to believers under the new dispensation? Has it not been true, ever since the kingdom of grace was set up in this fallen world, that in every heart, where God has pleased to write his law, he has never suffered it to be obliterated? It is in relation to the believer under the Old Testament, (though it is strictly true in relation to the believer of every other period,) that it was said, "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide." Ps. 37: 31.

I see nothing in any part of the sacred volume which leads to the conclusion, that the New Testament church, either in its beginning or progress, would present a sinless community. The church of God, from the time of its being first set up in the world, has been on the advance, though it has had its seasons of retrogression. Like the mustard seed, it has been growing up into a tree: and like the rising light, it has shown brighter and brighter; which it will continue to do until the perfect day. There was doubtless more light after than before the flood. The light was much increased by the calling of Abraham, and by the establishment of the church in his family. It was still further increased by the exodus of the Israelites from the house of bondage, their sojourn in the wilderness, and their settlement in the land of promise. Even the Babylonian captivity did in some respects improve the character of the church, as it effectually broke them off from the worship of idol gods. A great increase of light was caused by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. After the Redeemer's ascension to heaven, the improvement of the church was for a while very rapid. There was not only an increasing number of disciples, but the disciples received a more copious baptism of the Holy Ghost. Great grace was upon them all. After the lapse of some centuries, there commenced a long night of darkness that could be felt. This darkness began to be dispelled by the reformation of the sixteenth century. In the Millennium, the righteousness of the church will go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. There

will be a great increase in the degree of grace, as well as in the number of its subjects. The weakest believers then, will equal the most eminent believers of the present period. But there may be all this increase of holiness from one period to another, and yet the most favoured period come short of perfect holiness. As all the periods, which precede the Millennium, are very deficient in sanctification in comparison to the Millennium itself, so that period will be very deficient in comparison to the holiness of the heavenly state.

Sixthly. In support of the doctrine of a present entire sanctification, it is urged, that provision has been made for such a blessing: that the death of Christ furnishes as ample provision for a perfect sanctification as for a perfect justification. To this it may be replied,

1st. That the death of Christ has made provision for the bestowment of some blessings, which will never be actually bestowed. The atonement, made by the death of Christ, is an infinite provision. The law of God is so greatly honored, and the sin of man so openly and pointedly condemned, that it provides a way of salvation for all the guilty children of Adam, even for those who perish in their sins. We are informed that in the Christian church there would arise false teachers, who would deny the Lord that *bought them*, and thus bring on themselves swift destruction; implying, that some who are bought with the blood of Christ, will nevertheless fail to be cleansed with his blood, and will therefore go down to destruction. Though punitive justice has been so



highly honored by the sufferings of our Divine Substitute, that it presents no obstacle to the conversion and forgiveness of any sinner, or number of sinners; yet God, whose wisdom is infinite, does not see fit to exert his power to subdue the heart of every sinner, and thus bring him to accept of the atonement. A perfect sanctification can therefore be no more inferred from the infinitude of the atonement, than the sanctification of the whole race can be inferred from the same premises: and such a universal sanctification, I conclude, is no part of the creed of our opponents.

2d. As to the favors which God designs not only to proffer, but actually to bestow on the children of men through the atonement of Christ, his wisdom determines the time and order of their bestowment. The infinitude of the provision which he has made, does not prevent the exercise of his wisdom in the bestowment of his favors. "Wherein," saith the apostle, "he hath abounded towards us in all *wisdom and prudence*." The atonement lays a foundation for God to put his rebellious creatures into a state of merciful probation. They are thereby brought into a *salvable* state, before they are in a state of salvation. It is through the death of Christ that we enjoy the inspired word, together with its ministry. Through the same medium the Spirit comes down to awake us from our slumbers, and impart conviction to our consciences. These favors are all conferred before the heart is at all brought back from a state of rebellion; that is, before it experiences the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Now would it be good reasoning, to say, that since the



death of Christ has made as complete provision for the regeneration of the elect as for their conviction, or even their enjoyment of a probation of mercy, therefore their regeneration must have taken place as early as their conviction, or even as early as the commencement of their new probation? And is it any more logical to say, that since the death of Christ has made provision for the entire sanctification of believers, therefore their entire sanctification must extend back to the very hour of their conversion? Nobody dreams of charging it to any defect in the atonement, that men are not renewed even before they are awakened and convicted. Nor is it owing to any want of fulness in the atonement, that regeneration and perfect sanctification do not take place simultaneously. In the whole work of man's salvation there is a wise arrangement. God always puts every thing in its proper place. It is wisely ordered that the conviction of the conscience should precede the renewing of the mind. And who can say that it is not ordered with equal wisdom, that the renovation of the mind shall precede its complete sanctification? Now if it may precede it by any distance of time, who can say that the distance may not be as great as that which intervenes between the day of espousals, and the day of death?

3d. The ampleness of the provision, which the death of Christ has made for a complete *justification* and *sanctification*, constitutes no valid argument to prove that both of them become complete at the same time. There is a sense in which neither of them becomes complete until the close of our probation. Such is

the structure of the covenant of grace, that the heirs of promise who are once forgiven, will never again come into condemnation, so as to rank with the children of wrath: nor will they, after having the work of sanctification commenced in their hearts, ever rank again with the unregenerate world. With the children of wrath they will never rank again, because the first act of forgiveness, which proceeds from the divine throne, stands connected with a promise of grace, either to preserve them from backsliding, or to heal their backslidings; also, with a promise that, on every new return to God with penitential sorrow, he will return to them with pardoning mercy. So that God's first act of pardon towards the penitent, secures all the subsequent acts which their case shall require, until all their iniquities are so forgiven as to be remembered no more. And as in justification, the first act of pardoning mercy secures all the subsequent acts which the case shall require; so in the sanctification of the heart, the work begins with regeneration, and this secures the perpetuity of sanctifying influence until the whole heart shall become sanctified.

Between sanctification and justification there is of necessity this difference: imperfect sanctification supposes there always remains some corruption in the heart, unremoved by sanctifying influence; but the imperfection of our justification does not necessarily suppose that some portion of our past sins always remain unforgiven; but it supposes our liability to incur new guilt, which will call for the renewed exercise of repentance on our part, and of forgiveness on the part of God. Our first coming to Christ by a holy

faith is connected with the remission of all our past sins. Rom. 3: 25. But since, after this, we need the repetition of sanctifying grace to renew us to repentance, we must of consequence stand in need of the repetition of pardoning mercy. This is implied in that apostolic benediction, "Grace unto you and peace be multiplied." Grace is that influence which purifies the heart, and peace is that divine comfort which is consequent upon such purification: both of these need to be *multiplied*.

But were we to concede to our opponents that, from the very first exercise of faith in the Redeemer, our justification is uninterruptedly perfect, I see not how they can build on this an argument to establish the doctrine for which they contend; since it is conceded on their part, that very many have been, and still are imperfectly sanctified, whom they deem to be completely justified. It appears, then, according to their own views, that perfect justification and perfect sanctification are not uniformly cotemporary.

One would suppose they must see that their argument derived from the atonement's sufficiency for perfect sanctification as well as justification, had failed them: for if this argument would prove the perfect sanctification of one pardoned sinner, it would prove the same of every other.

Seventhly. It is urged, that if perfect sanctification is never attained in this life, none can expect it; and if it be not a matter of expectation, it will not be sought after, and, of course, there will be but little progress made in the divine life. In reply to this argument we would say, that the hope of the imme-

mediate attainment of a desired object, is by no means necessary to awaken effort for its attainment. Jacob served Laban twice seven years for his daughter Rachel, before he obtained the prize he sought: but such was the desirableness of the object he sought, that it made the whole of this time seem to him but a few days. Is the worldling prevented from making effort to acquire property, because he does not expect to acquire it all at once? Does the patient, who is convalescent, feel indifferent in the use of means to effect a complete removal of his malady, merely because his return to health is by degrees? Does not the man who runs in a race strain every nerve to gain the prize, though he knows that every step, which precedes the last, will fail of reaching the goal? All his previous steps serve to bring him nearer to this point, but it is actually reached by none except the very last. Why then may not the Christian, in running his spiritual race, press toward the mark with increasing zeal, although he is convinced that he shall always, while on earth, be obliged to confess that he has not reached it?

I am sensible that the resemblance between the race in the Grecian games, and that which the Christian is running, is not perfect; for in the former, it is physically impracticable to reach the goal, until all the intermediate steps have been taken; but in the latter, it is an inexcusable difficulty which prevents the goal from being reached by the first step of the race. Indeed every step towards the goal is an attempt to reach it, even without any delay. The righteousness, which the Holy Spirit has infused into the

heart of the Christian, thirsts after perfect righteousness. There is nothing short of perfect conformity to God which will fully satisfy this thirst. It is the nature of holiness in the Christian's heart, to desire to possess a perfection of repentance, a perfection of faith and of every other grace of the Spirit. This is the mark which he continually seeks to reach. "If," said Paul, "I might by any means attain to the resurrection of the dead; not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." Submission to the will of God, even in his withholding that fulness of grace which is required to enable us to expel every vestige of sin from the heart, and attain to a perfect sanctification, will, in my opinion, have no mischievous influence to retard our progress in the Christian race. The most perfect submission to the divine arrangement in this matter has nothing in it of the nature of complacency in sin.

"But supposing that a state of perfect sanctification is never reached in this life, what possible detriment," it will be asked, "can arise from the mistake? Will not the influence of the mistake (in case it should prove such) operate favorably by prompting to greater efforts for growth in grace?" I answer, that a false conception of things is far from being the proper means to further the cause of piety in the world, or in the hearts of individual believers. They who are chosen to salvation, let it be remembered, are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit and *belief of the truth*—not the belief of an error. The tendency of error is always noxious, let it be ever so

specious. Satan is never a more dangerous foe than when he is transformed into an angel of light.

Now if there is not a just man upon earth who doeth good and sinneth not, my believing that there are just men on earth who do good without having any external or internal defect of character, may expose me to imagine that I am one of these distinguished men. If I am actually a just man, but under this mistake, (as I certainly must be, provided there is no such character on earth,) will the mistake be harmless? Will it not stupefy me, and cause me to rest in imperfect attainments, as though they were perfect?

And what is more dangerous still—should any one imagine himself entirely free from sin, at the same time that he is in reality the servant of sin, a belief in the doctrine which supposes sinless perfection to be the privileged condition of some of the saints on earth, would tend to confirm him in the good opinion he entertains of himself; and this would place him beyond the influence of those means by which graceless men are stirred up to seek the salvation of their souls. Should such a one be counselled to buy gold tried in the fire to make him rich, his heart would reply, “I am already rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.”

## LECTURE II.

VARIOUS ARGUMENTS DERIVED FROM THE SCRIPTURES TO PROVE THAT CHRISTIANS, WHILE ON EARTH, NEVER REACH A STATE OF SINLESS PERFECTION.

For what saith the Scripture? ROM. 4 : 3.

THE principal arguments which are adduced in support of the doctrine of sinless perfection, have now been placed before you ; and their inconclusiveness. I trust, has been shown. If those arguments which we have canvassed do not prove the doctrine, is there not good reason to believe it to be incapable of proof? I am now prepared to bring forward such arguments as have weight in convincing me, and which I think must have weight in convincing you, my hearers, that sinless perfection is a state to which none—not even the most favored of God's children—arrive in the present life.

I. *Bible saints, not excepting the most eminent, are described as imperfect men.* In the life of Noah, the father of the new world, the sacred historian records an instance of drunkenness. In the life of Abraham, the father of the faithful, he records two instances of his prevaricating, and denying his wife, through that fear of man which bringeth a snare. A similar offence was committed by his son Isaac, though he

was doubtless a true believer. The deception practised on Isaac by Rebekah and Jacob, forms a dark spot in the character of the mother and the son ; yet both of them were the friends of God. Moses and Aaron were saints, and the former was distinguished by peculiar nearness of access to God ; and yet even he, as well as his less favored brother, was an imperfect man ; for he had his spirit so angered that he spoke unadvisedly with his tongue. David was a man after God's own heart : but there was an instance in which he gave great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Solomon was beloved of his God ; nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah, were pious kings ; but it is evident that they were not sinless characters. Job was so eminent a saint, that at that period of the world he stood in the highest rank ; for it is said, there was none like him in the earth : and yet he uttered things for which the Lord reprov'd him, and for which he at length abhorred himself.

Nor are the saints of the New Testament exhibited to us as sinless characters. It is said of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, that he walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ; and yet he is evidently criminated for not giving fuller credit to the message which was sent to him from the Lord by a holy angel. The disciples of Christ, even those who were clean through the word which he had spoken to them, were not fully cleansed from the filthiness of their flesh and spirit. He repeatedly reprov'd them for the weakness of their faith, and for their ambitious desires after hon-



orable preferment. Though that copious effusion of the Spirit, which they received on the day of Pentecost and thenceforward, greatly advanced them in holiness, yet it did not purge away all their dross. After this there was a certain occasion when, as Paul informs us, he withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be *blamed*. At which time the other Jews *dissembled* likewise with him: insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. There was another time when Paul and Barnabas, who were fellow travellers in performing missionary labors among the heathen, had a contention so sharp as to produce a rupture between them. Though they were men full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, men who had hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus, yet are we compelled, by this sketch of their history, to view them as men who had not risen altogether above the weakness of depraved human nature.

The men to whom I have referred you, it will be acknowledged, are some of the most shining examples of moral excellence which are to be found in the biography of the Bible. If there are other men, in whose biography no instance of transgression is noted, it gives us no right to infer that they were absolutely faultless. I do not know that any blot rests on the character of Daniel. But he himself informs us that, on occasion of that memorable fast which he kept, near the close of the Babylonish captivity, he confessed *his own sin* as well as the sin of his people. Perhaps it will be said, that the solitary cases of deviation from the path of God's commandments, which are charged against these good men,

amount to no proof that they did not, for the greater part of their life, render an entire obedience to these commandments. I have no doubt there was, for the most part, a kind of blamelessness connected with their daily deportment. This was also eminently true in the case of David Brainerd, a character well known in the Christian community. In the memoir which Edwards has given us of this devoted missionary, I recollect but one instance of transgression which is calculated to arrest our attention. But those confessions of departure from God and short-comings in duty, with which his diary abounds, show us that, however regular his life might have been, he was in his own estimation very far from being a sinless man.

II. In accordance with what the Scripture says concerning the sinful defects of particular saints, it expressly informs us that *such defects are common to their whole number*. In Solomon's dedicatory prayer he intercedes for Israel in language like this: "If they sin against thee, (for there is *no man* that sinneth not)." What he meant by saying, "There is *no man* that sinneth not," may be learned by this demand, which he makes in the book of his proverbs: "Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" This interrogatory clearly imports that there is no man who can say in truth that his heart is so perfectly clean as to be entirely pure from his sin. With this agree the words of the same inspired writer in the book of Ecclesiastes: "For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth

good and sinneth not.” In this last passage we notice, first, That sinful imperfection is predicated of *the just man*. He is the only one among the sons of men who does any good; but this is not all that he does—he does evil, he sins. We notice, secondly, that there is no just man in *all the world* who has gone beyond this sinful imperfection. The declaration amounts to an assertion, that such a man can be found nowhere upon *earth*—neither in the land of Israel, nor among the Gentile nations. It implies not merely that such a man could not then be found on the earth; but also that the same would be true while the earth should remain. The Bible is the only inspired book with which the church will ever be furnished; at whatever period therefore her members shall read its sacred pages, they will find it recorded, “There is *not* a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.”

When the apostle James tells us that in many things we all offend, is it not the same as to say with Solomon, there is no man that sinneth not? And does not that declaration of Christ, which asserts that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light, imply that the distinctive character of the latter, is less perfect than that of the former? Does it not clearly imply that while the children of this world are *sinner*s entire, and wholly governed by worldly wisdom, the children of light are not *saint*s entire, so as to be uniformly influenced by heavenly wisdom?

If perfection is to be found upon earth, it is doubtless to be found in the church, which is the salt of the

earth. But the Scriptures are far from representing the church to be a sinless community. Nor do they confine its defective character to its graceless members. The Head of the church speaks of himself as being a Vine which has two sorts of branches, fruitful and unfruitful. But he represents the fruitful branches as needing to be purged, to render them more fruitful.

The spouse, described in the Song of Solomon, seems to be the true bride of the Lamb: yet she confesses herself to be black as well as comely. In the third chapter of this book, she speaks of seeking him whom her soul loved, and that repeatedly, in such a drowsy and ineffectual manner as to prove unsuccessful. But on seeking him more diligently, she found him and held him fast, charging all around her to avoid every thing which would tend to disturb her communion with him. Yet after this season of delightful communion, in the fifth chapter she describes herself as having fallen into such a dead sleep, as to be almost incapable of being awaked out of it, even by the voice of her Beloved, when knocking at her door. From the whole tenor of this allegorical book, it is made evident, that the drowsiness which it describes, is not intended to characterize the graceless members; and the wakefulness, to characterize the good members of the church. The representation is clearly this: That the same individuals were alternately drowsy and wakeful; that the same, who at first were so drowsy, as to be incapable of being drawn from their bed of sloth, to open the door to the heavenly Bridegroom, were brought at length cheer-

fully to open their door, and were ready to faint with grief when they found he had withdrawn himself from them. This I think must be a plain case; if the spouse described in this sacred book is the church of Christ, her best members are culpably deficient in the strength and constancy of their love.

The same defect of character is implied by the parable of the ten virgins. Besides that imperfection of the visible church, which is denoted by those virgins who took no oil in their vessels, is there not an imperfection extending to the other class of her members, denoted by their all slumbering and sleeping while the Bridegroom tarried? And does not the very *trimming* of their lamps imply that their light had become dim through some previous neglect? The parable of the tares of the field very naturally presents to our view the imperfection of the church, as partly consisting in the unfinished sanctification of the subjects of grace. The tares might not be gathered up, lest the wheat should be rooted up with them. It is said by naturalists, that in the early stage of their growth, tares have a considerable resemblance to wheat. But however much graceless men may resemble men of grace, if the latter were made perfect in holiness so as no longer to have any moral resemblance to the unregenerate, I should suppose that a discrimination between the two classes of members in the church could be made, without any danger of mistake.

The representation which the Scripture makes concerning the character common to all the *teachers* and *officers* of the church, under both the Old and

New Testament dispensations, does much in establishing the doctrine of the universal imperfection of the saints. If God designed to raise to perfection any portion of his church on earth, we should naturally expect that this peculiar favor would be granted to those who minister at his altar, and who are constituted the interpreters of his will. It is undoubtedly of the last importance to the cause of religion, that these should be men of pre-eminent attainments. But I believe that the Scripture has never represented them as sinless characters. That it has made a different representation, is very manifest. How clearly is the sinful imperfection of the ancient priesthood taught, in the epistle to the Hebrews. This will appear in the following quotations: "For every high priest" (the highest office in the Jewish church) "taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way; for that *he himself also is compassed with infirmity*. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for *himself*, to offer for sins." Again, after the sinless nature of the great High Priest has been fully asserted, it is said of Him, "Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices first for his own sins, and then for the people's.—For the law maketh men high priests which have *infirmity*." Sinful infirmity is clearly intended in both these passages. It is worthy of particular notice, that the thought seems never to have been indulged that a case could ever occur, that a high

priest, taken from among *men*, would be found who was not compassed with infirmity, and who would not need *daily* to offer sacrifices for his own sins. See Heb. 5: 1—3; 7: 27, 28.

Among the teachers of the Jewish church, the prophets held a conspicuous place, and in general they were distinguished for their piety. The apostle James, in the fifth chapter of his epistle, holds them up to his brethren as an example worthy of their imitation. But that he did not intend to describe them as examples of sinless perfection, we infer from what he says in the same chapter concerning one of the most distinguished of their number: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly," &c. Its being said that he was a man *subject to like passions with us*, seems most naturally to denote his imperfection in holiness: otherwise the same remark would have applied to the Redeemer himself; who, as to all the innocent appetites of the body, and affections of the mind, was subject to like passions with his brethren of the human race. In prefacing the account of the prevalence of the prophet's prayers, by telling us that he was subject to like passions as we are, did not the apostle manifestly design to encourage us to go boldly to the throne of grace, though conscious of great moral imperfection?

Some may imagine, though all the ministers of religion under the Old Testament were men who needed daily forgiveness, that the ministry of the New Testament is quite different. But do the Scriptures authorize us to consider the difference to be as



great as between sinful imperfection and sinless perfection? Christ himself kept a theological school to train men for the ministry of the gospel: and the disciples of this school were all, one excepted, favored with the inward teachings of the Spirit. But this is certain, that while they remained in the school, though aided by the instructions, prayers and examples of a perfect Master, they did not one of them rise to a sinless state. They were just completing their three years' course, when they exhibited affecting proof of a sinful attachment to earthly honors. It seems to have been at the time of the last pass-over, that we hear of their having a strife among them, which of them should be accounted greatest. Luke 22: 24. Even the beloved disciple once came, with his mother and brother, to request a place of honorable distinction in his kingdom; which they all supposed he was then about to set up on the earth. I am aware that the crucifixion and resurrection of their Master, and the season of prayer which preceded the Pentecost, together with the wonderful effusion of the Spirit on that memorable day, greatly improved the character, as well as the knowledge, of those whom Christ had been training for the ministry of the word: but, as it has been shown under the preceding article, they still gave evidence of being imperfect men.

Is not the moral imperfection of the whole *New Testament* ministry implied in this declaration of Paul: *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us?* This was as much as to say, that men.



who not only have frail dying bodies, but whose souls have been entirely depraved, and now but partially recovered from that depravity, are employed, instead of holy angels or the spirits of just men made perfect, to be the heralds of the cross; that by means of the weakness and unworthiness of the instruments employed, the greater glory might redound to God, the Supreme Agent.

III. In perfect agreement with those scriptural representations which I have already placed before you, it is found that *the greatest saints, in their best frames and nearest approaches to God, appear to be the most deeply convinced of their sinful defects.* That Job was, in his day, a saint of the first magnitude, we have the best proof, even the testimony of Him who can neither lie nor be deceived. At the commencement of his sore trials he had a high degree of piety, and yet at the close of them he appears to have had still more. But with all this increase of piety, he was deeply affected with his remaining depravity. Now it was that he exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth." It was in the continuance of the same excellent frame of mind that he soon after cried out, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." In the nineteenth Psalm, David expresses the adoring views which he had of the glory of God, as declared in the book of nature and the book of inspiration. With these views of Divine glory before him, he

turns his eyes within and exclaims, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

The prophet Isaiah tells us of a vision which he had in the year that king Uzziah died. He saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. He heard the seraphims in their worship crying one to another, and saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And what effect did this vision have on the mind of the prophet? It increased his conviction of his own sinfulness, as well as of the sinfulness of those among whom he lived. His language on the occasion was, "Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Daniel, in the tenth chapter of his book, gives us an account of a vision he had, which I think much resembles John's vision of Christ, recorded in the first chapter of the Apocalypse; and he informs us that as an effect of this vision, his comeliness was turned into corruption. Is it rational to understand him to refer to the comeliness of his face? Is it not more reasonable to believe he means to tell us, such was the effect of the Divine glory which he saw, that his moral beauty seemed to fade away, and even to be changed into deformity? When Moses came down from the mount, where he had been forty days conversing with God, all the camp of Israel saw that the skin of his face shone; while he himself was not conscious of the lustre. Was not this intended to teach

us that while near approaches to God render us more attractive objects to beholders, they serve to produce such increasing conviction of the existence and the evil nature of sin as tends to prevent us from thinking highly of ourselves?

One of the first interviews which Peter had with Christ was at the lake of Gennesaret. After he had heard the sermon which was preached in his fishing boat, and had seen his net filled with a multitude of fishes, the very day after he had toiled all night without any success, he exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He doubtless meant to say that he was not worthy of the presence of such a visitant. The presence of Christ had this effect on Peter, to make him feel more deeply than before, that he was a *sinful* man. If he had such humbling views of himself on this occasion, how must he have felt on the day of Pentecost when Christ so emphatically made him a fisher of men?

Near approaches to God have had such an effect on the children of God in every part and period of the world. This remark, I believe, is confirmed by most of the biographies of men and women, who have been distinguished for the soundness of their faith and the depth of their experimental religion. I will here take the liberty to mention the case of Thomas Hallyburton, an eminent Scotch divine, whose memoir is well worthy of a perusal. His communion with God was uncommonly intimate; and in proportion to this, appears to have been his conviction of the dreadful evils of his heart. As to those followers of the Lamb that are yet in their pil-

grimage, very many among them, who appear highly to prize communion with God, agree with Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and other Bible saints, in testifying that in their nearest approaches to the Holy One of Israel they have the most affecting sense of their vileness—not only of their former, but of their present vileness.

Now if the point, which we have been endeavoring to establish under the two preceding articles, is true, namely, *That there is no sinless character, even among good men*, it is not difficult to understand why good men should be the most affected with their sinfulness in their nearest approaches to God. It is not because they have the most sin at such seasons; for the reverse is doubtless true: but if they have any sin remaining in them, these will be the times when they will perceive it with uncommon clearness; for the light of God's holiness makes their darkness manifest.

IV. Additional evidence, that moral imperfection is the universal condition of believers on earth, is obtained by looking at *the structure of those two covenants of promise which relate to their salvation; the first of which was made between the Persons of the Godhead, before the foundation of the world; and the other with believers themselves, after their translation from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son*. Both these covenants contemplate the redeemed family to be in a state of moral imperfection, so long as they continue in their earthly pilgrimage. In the covenant between the Persons of

the Godhead, which in modern times has been distinguished by being called *the covenant of redemption*, provision is made for the preservation of the church on earth as an imperfect society—imperfect even in its best members. In this covenant the Mediator engages to make intercession for transgressors: not merely to procure for them the grace of regeneration, but also that grace which is needful to recover them from their wanderings. The apostle John, addressing himself to Christians, says, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not: and if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” It appears from a passage in the epistle to the Hebrews, which I will now cite, that his advocacy at the court of heaven is much needed by his people on earth: “Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Even Christ's own family needed his continual intercessions for them. He said to Peter, “Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” In this instance it appears that Christ did not pray that Peter might be preserved from temptation, or from yielding to it, but rather that he might be recovered from that fall which it would occasion. This will assist us in understanding that important text relative to temptation in general, which is found 1 Cor. 10:13: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but

God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Neither of the Persons of the Godhead stands pledged to prevent believers from being tempted to sin ; nor to prevent their being foiled by the tempter ; but they are all engaged : either, first, to prevent the believer from being tempted ; or, secondly, to prevent his yielding to the temptation ; or, thirdly, to deliver him out of the snare of the devil, in which he has been taken.

You will remember that Christ spoke of things which were written in the Psalms concerning him. The eighty-ninth Psalm seems to have much in it concerning the Redeemer. Under that covenant of royalty which God made with David, to give the throne of Israel to him and his seed after him, is plainly exhibited the covenant of redemption, wherein the Father engages to give his Son a holy seed, whom he will never utterly cast off. But it is contemplated that this holy seed, while on earth, will be in such a state of imperfection as to expose them to forsake his law, and not walk in his judgments ; to break his statutes, and not keep his commandments. In this case God threatens : " Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes : nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from *him*," (that is, from *Christ*, with whom the covenant of redemption is made,) " nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of my lips." It is here supposed that such might be

the conduct of Christ's elect seed, after their incorporation into his family, as to provoke his righteous Father to expel them thence, were it not for that everlasting covenant which he had made with his Son, their surety; wherein he had engaged not to proceed to such extremities in manifesting his displeasure against his wayward children, as to disinherit and cast them off forever. All this makes it evident, that the covenant of redemption contemplated the moral imperfection of the Israel of God, while they should remain in this state of probation.

*The covenant of grace*, which is made with believers themselves, in and through their Surety, is the development of the covenant between the Persons of the Godhead, relating to their redemption from iniquity and the curse of the law. And in this covenant, which is made with themselves, their imperfect recovery from a sinful state is manifestly recognized. The Psalmist says, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Again he says, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Ps. 130: 3, 4, and 143: 2. In these passages it is evident that David viewed the covenant which God had made with his servants, to be so constructed as to provide for the forgiveness of their repeated transgressions; else there would not be one of them that could stand: that if repeated acts of forgiveness on the part of God had not been pledged in the covenant of his grace, the repeated offences of his servants would not only interrupt, but bring to an

end their friendly intercourse with him. He pleads, "There is forgiveness, that thou mayest be feared." This was as much as to say, that on earth the worship of God could not be kept up, but all intercourse with him, if commenced, must be broken off and discontinued, were he not on the mercy-seat, ready to forgive our daily faults. David gloried in the Lord as his shepherd—not merely because he made him to lie down in green pastures, but because he *restored his soul*. Had this characteristic been wanting, he would not have been the shepherd which such a flock as his stands in need of. See Ps. 23. Had the covenant of grace contained no such promise as that, Hos. 14: 4, "I will heal their backsliding," it would not have reached the necessitous condition of the church militant, nor the necessitous condition of any of its members.

It may be thought that the argument under this head proves no more than that some of the saints are imperfect, and that they are all liable to go out of the way. If so, it will at least stand as a cogent argument against that perfectionism which is of the grossest kind. But I am inclined to believe that, taken in connection with other arguments, it does much to support the doctrine of a universal imperfection of the Christian character. Since both of the covenants, to which I have referred, agree in making provision for the perseverance of saints, who are in a state of imperfect sanctification, it is natural to conclude that this is the condition of their whole number; unless express exceptions are made. And the Psalmist intimates that no such exceptions can



be made, when he says, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, *who shall stand?*"

V. *The discipline which God has established in his church, though well adapted to promote its purity, is itself an indication of its impurity or imperfection in holiness.* For the moral improvement of the church, the Lord has appointed a corrective discipline, requiring its members to be ready both to administer and receive reproof. Under the former dispensation this precept was enjoined: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." In harmony with this precept, David says, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." Ps. 141: 5. A precept similar to the one which was enjoined on the church of Israel, was given by the Savior to the New Testament church, for the regulation of its discipline; which shows that, even under this more luminous dispensation, the church was not expected to be free from all its dross. The precept relative to discipline, which was given by Christ, is as follows: "Moreover, if thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto

thee as a heathen man and a publican." Matt. 18: 15—17.

If the Scriptures had contemplated the Christian church as a faultless society, the apostle John would never have given its members such a direction as this: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." When the apostle James urges this upon Christians: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed," it teaches us never to expect to see a sinless church below the skies. And what Christ himself said, as recorded by the Evangelist Luke, is more to our purpose than what was said by either of his apostles: "Take heed to yourselves; If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him; and if he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." With the same thing in view, Peter, who had been forgiven the great sin of denying his Master, exhorts his brethren to have fervent charity among themselves; and then, to enforce his exhortation, he shows them what it would accomplish: "For charity shall cover the multitude of sins." Did not this imply that Christians would greatly need this excellent grace—that they would certainly need to be the *subjects*, and might need to be the *objects* of such an expansive charity?

Perhaps it will be said, that the necessity of discipline in the church of God, arises wholly from the intrusion of false brethren within her sacred walls.

It is doubtless a fact, that a majority of those cases, which require a whole course of church discipline, result from the admission of bad members. The subjects of grace, though not yet made perfect in holiness, are commonly men of a blameless life. Yet even these need the benefits of that discipline, which consists in brotherly admonition. They who, like David, will take reproof as a kindness, may sometimes very much need reproof. Christ reproved the church at Ephesus, because she had left her first love. If we were to take a pattern from our Master, and reprove for *declension in religion*, who would not be both the reprover and the reprovèd? Paul, in his epistle to Galatia, says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." It seems that the apostle would have the officers, and the most spiritual members of the church, be reminded that, while they are prosecuting a complaint against a delinquent, they are themselves liable to be tempted and overcome, so as to need the rod of discipline to recover them from some wayward course. Gal. 6: 1, 2.

If the argument now before us, which is derived from the necessity of discipline to keep pure the church, does not conclusively prove the imperfection of all Christians, it gives credibility to that doctrine. Provided every thing else is adapted to exhibit the family of Christ on earth, as but partially cleansed from sin, the argument derived from the establishment of discipline for the purpose of promoting the

purity of its members, will add weight to those arguments which more directly prove, that there is not a sinless character in the whole Christian family.

VI. Having shown that God's appointment of church discipline, for correcting the errors of his people, is a proof of their present imperfection, I proceed to show that *the discipline, which He himself uses with them all the while they remain on the earth, is a proof that so long their imperfection remains.*" "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." And these are the rod of discipline, with which the Lord chastises them for their good. "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" No, there is no evil befalls our nation, our church, our family, or ourselves, which does not come from the hand of God. In addressing the Old Testament church he says, "I have chosen thee in a furnace of affliction." But why in a furnace of affliction; seeing he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men? The prophet thus answers this interesting inquiry: "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." Isai. 27: 9. Now if this is all the fruit of his affliction, to take away his sin, may it not be safely inferred, that when all the sin of Jacob is taken away, his affliction will also cease? The prophet Malachi compares the Redeemer (whose coming he foretold) to a refiner and purifier of silver. But will a refiner and purifier, possessed of his benevolent spirit, keep up the fire after he perceives the dross is all purged away?

In the 12th chapter of Hebrews, the writer takes pains to console the disciples of Christ, under their multiplied afflictions. First he informs them, that there are no legitimate children in the family of God, whom he does not correct. Next he assures them, that God never corrects his children wantonly; (which parents might sometimes do;) but that He always does it for their profit. He then tells them wherein consists the profit of affliction, namely in this: "that we might be *partakers of his holiness.*" All this chastening and scourging plainly indicates the imperfect sanctification of those sons and daughters whom the Lord loveth. And with this representation the Scriptures all harmonize. When Peter had given the saints, to whom he wrote, some description of their heavenly inheritance, he reminds them that now for a season there was a *need be* for their being in heaviness through manifold temptation. But if their sin had all been purged away, would the necessity for their manifold temptation have still existed? Now since it is an undisputed fact, that so long as the heirs of promise tabernacle in the flesh, they groan, being burdened with a variety of afflictions, we argue hence, that so long as they live on the earth, they need the discipline of the rod, to correct their follies, and purge away their sin.

To arrest this argument, it may be urged that Christ, who knew no sin, was nevertheless a great sufferer: but it should be remembered, that he suffered as our substitute, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Though the sufferings of "the man Christ Jesus" exerted an influence to im-

prove his character, (for he was made perfect through sufferings,) still it would never have been consistent with the righteous government of God, to put the human nature of Christ into such a state of suffering, had not he, who knew no sin, consented to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. You will all doubtless agree with me in the sentiment, that it is incompatible with the nature of God's government, that he should put his loyal subjects, his perfectly obedient creatures, into a state of suffering, for the sake of giving greater strength to their loyalty and obedience. Will you not advance a step further, and agree with me in the sentiment, that it is repugnant to the genius of the Divine government, to continue the infliction of stripes on those transgressors who, through the blood of the cross, have attained to a heaven of perfect holiness? It is true that the *ill-desert* of such must of necessity remain, after they have reached the world of glory; yet they are no more liable to suffer punishment than creatures that never transgressed. Should it be urged, that in case suffering would add new degrees of excellency to their perfected minds, it would be consistent to bring them again into a suffering state, such a sentiment would be contrary to all the ideas we have formed concerning a perfect moral government, whether administered under a dispensation of law or of grace. Are we not prepared to say, it would be derogatory to the government of the Most High, to entertain the sentiment, that he may hereafter inflict misery upon just men whose spirits are made perfect in heaven?

And why are we not prepared to question the soundness of the sentiment, which supposes that punishment continues to be inflicted on just men whose spirits are made perfect on earth? Are they, after possessing the spirit and temper of heaven to perfection, still kept under the rod, merely because they remain on the earth? Is it not much more reasonable to believe, that when God finishes the work of sanctification in the hearts of his children, he will at the same time remove them from this world of suffering to one where there is no more curse?

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### LECTURE III.

#### THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.

VII. *The self-examination which the Scriptures urge upon Christians, to enable them to ascertain whether or not they have the Spirit of Christ, seems clearly to intimate that the Christian character does not in this life attain to perfection.* The Christian's perfection in holiness would be so totally different from the entire depravity of his natural state, as to render his conversion self-evident. It must be a matter which he would always know, and that with as much certainty as *he* knew, of whom we read in the ninth chapter of John, that, whereas he was blind, he now saw. The case of this blind man is often very properly introduced as an illustration of that

wonderful transition from darkness to light, which is effected by regeneration: but if the change in the spiritual vision of the regenerated man were as complete as that which took place in the natural vision of the man alluded to, there would be no call for that scrutinizing examination of our religion which is enjoined on all the professed subjects of grace. Had this been the case we should hardly have met with such an exhortation to a Christian church, as that in the last chapter of Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves:"—or that in his epistle to the Galatians: "If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." We can see, if Christians have in their hearts unsanctified affections mingled with those which are holy, that it will require a close examination to separate the precious from the vile, and to determine that any of these affections are of a holy nature. But if all their affections were of a holy character, it would seem to require no scrutinizing, no proving of themselves, to decide on the genuineness of their religion. Do the spirits of just men made perfect need such a scrutinizing self-examination, to determine whether they are Christians or reprobates, whether they are something or nothing?

They who advocate the doctrine of sinless perfection may say, "Since we do not pretend that all the regenerated are perfectly sanctified, some may be found in every church who need such exhortations as



those which have been cited from the epistles of Paul. Do you think, my brethren, that it would have been proper for a single member of those churches, to which these exhortations were given, to have said, "Such exhortations do not concern me, for they are wholly inapplicable to my case?" And is there a Christian on earth, who is not laid under obligation by these apostolic inculcations carefully to attend to the duty of self-examination?

The duty of examining the character of our religious experiences, is urged upon us by the other apostles as well as by Paul. Peter does it in his second epistle, which commences with this address: "To them that have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ." He proceeds but a few sentences before he exhorts them to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure." Now if they had not only possessed the precious faith, but a perfection of it, would it have required such diligence on their part to have gained an assurance of its genuineness? The first epistle of John, which consists of five chapters, is very much taken up in exhibiting discriminating tests of character. In the last chapter he says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Would they have needed that variety of tests which he placed before them, in case their renovated character had already come to perfection?

We meet with prayers in the Bible, corresponding with those exhortations which urge upon us a

careful scrutiny into the nature of our experimental religion. I will refer to two of these, both of which are found in the Psalms of David. In the 26th Psalm he makes this petition: "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart." In the 139th he makes a similar request: "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me." Such petitions would have had no place in his devotions, had he been a sinless character. He seems to have seen in himself a heart so imperfectly sanctified, as to excite a fear lest he should be left to cover up some wicked thing, instead of promptly confessing and forsaking it. Such was the discovery he had of the deceitfulness of his heart, that he was afraid to believe its report. He therefore begged the aid of His eyes who could try the reins and hearts of the children of men.

VIII. The remaining imperfection of the subjects of grace is clearly implied *by many of the exhortations which are addressed to them, urging upon them a closer attention to their own sanctification.* I would first refer you to that exhortation, which Peter gave to them who had obtained like precious faith with him, to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Grace is that favor which a sinner receives from God when holiness enters his heart, transforming him into the divine image. It is sanctification commenced; and to grow in grace is the same as to grow in sanctification, or to become more holy and less sinful. Now this exhor-

tation, being given to all the believers to whom the apostle wrote, manifestly supposes that some deficiency was common to them all; so that they all needed, and were under obligation, to seek a higher degree of sanctification.

Paul, who wrote more of the inspired epistles than all his brethren, often recognizes, in his exhortations to the Christians, their remaining depravity. To the Corinthian Christians he says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse* ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness* in the fear of God." Though they were dearly beloved brethren, there was still some filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit adhering to them, which needed to be cleansed away. And though they were supposed to be in some degree holy, yet their deficiency was such as to render it proper for him to urge them to *perfect* holiness in the fear of God. Perhaps it will be said that the Corinthian church was uncommonly deficient in their piety. If it was so, the same objection cannot be made against the church of Philippi. Yet to the saints at Philippi the apostle says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." There is an important difference between working out our own salvation, and working out our own justifying righteousness. The justifying righteousness, in which such guilty creatures are to be accepted, was wrought out by another and abler hand, and is already complete. But our *salvation*, as the word is used in the passage just quoted, consists in a deliver-

ance from the sin which dwells in us. In getting clear from sin we have a personal agency—a dependent agency it is true; for it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do—but this dependence does nothing to render useless our own activity. Now the command, to work out our own salvation, implies that our salvation from sin is not yet complete. It never becomes complete so long as a vestige of sin remains. This exhortation of Paul to his Philippian brethren, evidently supposed them to be imperfect saints. They had done something at the work which he urged upon them; and their salvation—their perfect deliverance from sin—was nearer than when they first believed; but it was not yet attained. The saints at Ephesus were exhorted to put off the old man, and to be renewed in the spirit of their mind: and those at Colosse, to mortify their members that were upon the earth, and to put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator. Do not exhortations like these make it evident, in relation to the subjects of grace, that though their old man was crucified, he had not yet expired; that though they were renewed in the spirit of their mind, they needed the renovation to be as it were daily renewed, and carried on to higher degrees of perfection?

There was perhaps no church, of which Paul entertained a better opinion than of that at Thessalonica. Especially does he commend their love to their Christian brethren: “But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which

are in all Macedonia : but we beseech you, brethren, that ye *increase more and more.*" He speaks of their love as being of a heavenly birth and a pure character ; as being expansive and exemplary ; and still he seems not contented with all this, but beseeches them to increase more and more. Did he not hereby say to them, " Though I commend your love to the brethren as somewhat distinguished, still I must tell you that it is not equal to your obligations : therefore suffer me to entreat you to grow in this grace, as well as in every other part of the Christian character." There is an exhortation in the beginning of the 12th chapter of Hebrews which is to our point : " Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Whatever may be intended by the sin which doth so easily beset us ; whether unbelief, which some suppose is meant, as being a sin which easily besets the whole family of Christ ; or what is more usually termed *the besetting* or *constitutional sin*, which may be different in different persons, this is evident, that such an exhortation indicates the sinful imperfection of those to whom it is addressed.

Those epistles, which Christ addressed to the seven churches of Asia, are couched in such language as to imply a blameable defect in the character of those whom he loved. There is scarcely one of the churches of whose piety he speaks more honorably than of Ephesus : and yet to this church he says, " I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left

thy first love." Their first love no doubt fell short of the pattern he left for their imitation : and now they had fallen below, not only the example which he had set them, but even below their own example at an earlier period of their Christian course.

I have now placed before you some of the exhortations, which God in his word addressed to the churches planted by the apostles, in that period when his Spirit was remarkably poured out from on high. Do not these exhortations clearly intimate the moral imperfection even of primitive Christians ? If it should be said, that the exhortations that have been introduced are but a few of the many which were addressed to the primitive Christians, I grant it : but while these exhortations manifestly imply the sinful imperfection of those to whom they were addressed, none of a contrary nature can be produced, implying that sinless perfection was the character of any church, or of a single member of any church. Let it be remembered that neither the exhortations nor commands, which enjoin a perfection of holiness, afford any proof of the actual existence of such perfection.

IX. *That growth in grace or progress in piety, which is attributed to the saints during their stay on earth, shows that a degree of sinful imperfection attends their whole course.* I know that there is a sense in which the saints in glory progress continually ; not only by the expansion of their intellect, but also by a correspondent increase of holiness, filling up the intellectual expansion with moral excellence. This, how-

ever, is not what is meant by their progressing in piety here upon earth. A gradual improvement of character, proceeding from one degree of sanctification to another, is the thing intended.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Cant. 8. 4. It is the spouse of Christ—the church of the living God, comprehending all her spiritual children. Her coming up from the wilderness, indicates her continual approximation towards the land of promise, not only in the order of time, but in her preparation for the enjoyment of its holy rest. But if progress in holiness is not made evident by this description of the church, as coming up from the wilderness towards her heavenly rest, such progress is made plain by that memorable passage, Prov. 4. 18: “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” On this passage I remark, (1.) Although it is found in the Old Testament, it belongs to that book of inspired proverbs or aphorisms, which in their application are restricted to no age or portion of the world. (2.) The person who is here denominated *the just*, is the same as the saint, the renovated man, the only truly good character known in the Scriptures. (3.) The *path* of the just is the road which he travels through this sinful world to one where sin is not found. As there is a highway for the traveller, through which he passes to the city or place of his destination, so there is a highway, called the way of holiness, which conducts the just man to the city of God. (4.) It is worthy of notice, that the path of the just is compared to the



shining light (that is, the sun) which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Here is an allusion to a thing which is very familiar to us all. We know that after the morning dawns, the light continually gains upon the darkness, until, by the sun's rising, the light of day becomes perfect.

This striking figure, which the Holy Ghost selected for the sake of illustrating the good man's journey through this dreary wilderness to the land of promise, supposes his whole existence to be divided into three distinct periods. First, The period of his unregeneracy, which comprises that portion of his life when he is in total moral darkness; before the day dawns and the day-star arises in his heart. Secondly, The period which comprises the whole of his religious life, from the dawning of grace in his soul, till the close of his pilgrimage. This, in the passage before us, is what is intended by the just man's *path*. It commences at the spot where his feet are first turned into the narrow way which leadeth unto life, and terminates with that eternal life to which it leads. Now this moral path is here very plainly described by allusion to the progress which light makes in the natural world, after the dawn until the rising of the sun. This is precisely the thing which the figure in the passage before us was designed to illustrate, namely, the *progressive improvement* of the just man's character. Thirdly, The other period of the just man's existence is denoted by perfect day; which is nothing less than heaven itself. This bright period is endless in its duration.

These three periods of the just man's existence



are described by a marked difference. The first and the last, however, agree in this, that they are both entire and unmixed. The first is entire darkness, the last, perfect light. Wherein does the middle period differ from the other two? In this; that it is made up of a mixture of darkness and of light. In this mixed period, the light of holiness is gradually advancing, and the darkness of sin is receding. Here then, in this description of the path of the just (a description which is of no private interpretation or application) we perceive that the Christian character, while on earth, is never perfect, but that it is in a state of progressive improvement.

If the passage which has now been examined had no support from parallel passages, it would nevertheless be enough to prove the doctrine for which it has been adduced, unless antagonistic passages should be found of sufficient strength to destroy its testimony. I am not aware that this passage has a single antagonist in all the Scriptures; but I am sure it has many auxiliaries. In the book of Job there is an auxiliary text, where it is said, "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." The righteous man, and he that hath clean hands, mean the same character: and his becoming stronger and stronger, as he advances in his way to heaven, intends the same thing as the increasing brightness of the just man's path. There are passages which represent God's noblest work here on earth, by the sowing of precious seed; which in prepared ground takes root, and in due time brings forth a harvest. The commencement of

a work of grace in the heart, is illustrated by the seed's vegetating and taking root, and the progress of the work, by its ripening to a harvest. "So," said the Savior, "is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." Mark 4, 26—29. This allusion to husbandry is designed to illustrate the stages of spiritual growth, from the time the seed of the word takes root in the believer's heart, until he becomes ripe for heaven: and when ripe, the representation is, that he is brought thither without delay, just as the ripened harvest is immediately gathered into the barn.

What did the Savior intend by comparing the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed, which, though a very small seed, produces a plant which resembles a tree? and also by comparing it to leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened? Whether this represents the kingdom of heaven as a holy community on earth, or as a holy principle in the hearts of believers, it illustrates the progressive character of this divine kingdom. From small beginnings, by passing through various grades, it becomes great: it is not all done at once.

Christians in the church below are represented by *children* who are growing up to the stature of men;

and as needing the ministry of the word and other means of grace to further their growth, till they come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Eph. 4: 11—13. Since these means are designed for Christians in their spiritual nonage, their growing state, we infer that such is the state of all those who are still kept under these means. In the fourth chapter of Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, after speaking of the sore afflictions which the followers of Christ were called to endure, he mentions this as a great support under their trials; that, though their outward man was perishing, *their inward was renewed day by day*. The renewing of the inward man day by day, while it intimated their progress in sanctification implied its imperfection. Had the work of divine grace been already brought to perfection, they would still have needed the power of the Holy Ghost to hold them up, but not to renew them day by day. The new man which was formed within them, and therefore called "the inward man," and "the hidden man," needed a daily improvement of its renovated character.

X. *The prayers of the saints, both such as were prescribed for their use, and such as we are informed they actually used, clearly imply the sinful imperfection of the petitioners.* Among the prayers prescribed in the Scriptures, that form which is distinguished by being called *the Lord's prayer* claims our first attention; for though I do not suppose that we are required to repeat it every day, it is after this manner we are

required to pray at all times. In our being taught to ask our heavenly Father to give us this day our daily bread, it is clearly implied, that prayer is to be a daily exercise. As soon as we have asked for our daily bread, we are in the next place instructed to ask the forgiveness of our debts, that is, of our sins. And I think it is evidently supposed, that we shall need to ask the forgiveness of our sins with the same frequency as we shall need new supplies of bread. That a petition for the daily forgiveness of sin, and for its removal by sanctifying influence, agrees with the experience of the great majority of the present generation of believers, I conclude will not be disputed. When from day to day they make the petition, *Forgive us our debts*, they do not refer merely to their old debts, which were contracted before they took the benefit of the act of grace, but they include in their petition numerous other debts which have been contracted since that period.

Another exemplar of acceptable prayer is given us by our Divine Teacher, in the eighteenth chapter of Luke. After he had spoken a parable, the object of which is to encourage importunity in prayer, he proceeds, in another parable, to teach the indispensableness of humble contrition in this duty. I refer to the parable of the two men who went up to the temple to pray, the one a pharisee, and the other a publican.

If any should imagine that the prayer, which Christ puts into the mouth of the publican, is designed to describe the awakened, rather than the renewed sinner, they greatly err; for the humility and contrition so prominent in this prayer, are clearly the

exercises of the renewed, and not of the unrenewed man. "God heareth not sinners," that is, while in their unrenewed state, since they are still in the flesh, and therefore cannot please God. But the prayer of the publican was heard; for he went down to his house in a justified state. It appears that by this parable Christ designed to teach his disciples, not only the necessity of repentance for past sins, but also the necessity of a deep conviction of remaining sinfulness, in order to render their prayers acceptable to a sin-hating God. The place the publican took, his gestures and words, are all expressive. "Standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." The character here portrayed, seems perfectly to agree with that of the man of Uz. See Job 40: 3-5.

A knowledge of the plague of one's own heart is made a requisite to acceptable prayer, as we learn from that prayer which Solomon was led by the Spirit of God to pour forth at the dedication of the temple. He requests God to hear what prayer and supplication soever should be made by any man, or by all the people of Israel, which should "know every man the plague of his own heart." This naturally imports that every man, including all such as pray, has a diseased heart—a heart not yet perfectly cured of sin, that worst of diseases, which is not improperly denominated "the plague of the heart." It also imports that a consciousness of this moral disease is indispensable to acceptable prayer.

I know that in a parallel passage in Chronicles it

is said, "When every one shall know his own *sore* and his own *grief*." But what sore causes so much grief to the man of prayer as an evil heart of unbelief, prone to depart from the living God? If it be necessary that he should be well acquainted with his outward troubles to qualify him to pray, much more that he should know his inward troubles, *the plague of his own heart*. One of the forms of prayer which God prescribed for the church of Israel, is found in the last chapter of Hosea. It is this: "Take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." What Israelite did not, and what Christian does not need to pray for the removal of his iniquity?

If we now examine those prayers recorded in the Scriptures which were poured forth by the servants of God on different occasions, we cannot but perceive that they prayed like men who were conscious of indwelling sin. Though David once pleaded, "Preserve my soul, for I am holy," there is certainly enough in those many petitions and confessions of his, which are scattered through the Psalms, to satisfy us that when he said, "I am holy," he did not mean to assert that he was so to perfection. In the 19th Psalm, in an address to his Maker, he says, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins." Though the 51st Psalm was called forth by the most affecting displays of his depraved nature, it appears that when he was employed in penning it, he had an uncommon degree of grace in exercise; but even then he felt the need of more grace.

He prayed not only for pardon, but for sanctification: "Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." His confessions of sin in the 38th Psalm, will serve to describe what his fellow saints in these latter days intend, when they say that they are greatly burdened with sin. His language is emphatic: "Mine iniquities have gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of all my foolishness." His confessions in the 40th Psalm present to our view a soul bowed down under an affecting sense, not only of past vile conduct, but also of a present vile heart: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me." In the 85th Psalm he thus expostulates with the Hearer of prayer: "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" If God's people had arrived to a sinless state, they would not need reviving again and again. Nor would they need to pray, *Turn us again*, provided they had not the remains of an evil heart of unbelief, inclining them to depart from the living God.

The 119th Psalm is a portion of Scripture which is peculiarly precious to all those who are spiritually minded. It exhibits the religion of the Psalmist to great advantage. Yet there is much in this Psalm which shows that *his* was not the religion of one who had attained to sinless perfection. I have not time, unless I protract this part of the subject to a disproportionate length, to refer you to more than two or three things which show this. One is the confession



which he makes at the close of the Psalm: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." This is immediately followed with the prayer—"Seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." Another confession he makes is this: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust;" which is followed by a petition for quickening grace—"Quicken thou me." To *quicken* is to remove death by imparting life. The word, when used in application to moral subjects, denotes a transition from a state of entire sinfulness to the commencement of a new and spiritual life. But when the Psalmist prayed, "Quicken thou me," it did not imply an acknowledgment that he was an unregenerate man, dead in trespasses and sins: yet it did amount to an acknowledgment, that some degree of that spiritual death, which once had an entire dominion over him, still hung about him. There are more than ten places in this one Psalm where he prays to be quickened, or recognizes the goodness of God in having granted him quickening grace.

The prayers which are found in the Psalms of David are not only the prayers of an eminent saint; but we must not forget that they were designed to form a basis and exemplar for the prayers and songs of the whole church, not only during the darker dispensation of the Old Testament, but to the end of time. If it had been God's plan, that the church should at length receive grace enough to cause her to emerge out of a state of imperfect sanctification, such prayers as are placed before us in the book of Psalms, accompanied with such frequent confessions of sin, and groanings under its burden, and such repeated pe-



titions for quickening influence, would never have been given us for a model.

There are other prayers of particular saints, and of the church as a body of saints, scattered through the Old Testament, which breathe the same humble contrite spirit with those of the Psalmist. For examples of this kind, I would refer you to the prayers which are recorded in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel, and particularly to those which are found in the ninth chapter of each of those books.

Prayer was much practised in Gospel times, and is abundantly inculcated in the New Testament; yet but few prayers of any length are recorded in this part of the Bible. Christ's intercessory prayer occupies more space than any other. In this, he pleads for those whom his Father had given him, not that they should be immediately taken out of the world, but be kept from the evil. As a necessary means of their being preserved from the evil in the world, he prays, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." This request for their sanctification, is evidence that he considered their renovated character as being but imperfectly formed. In harmony with this prayer of their Redeemer, the apostles themselves prayed, "Lord, *increase* our faith." Never, while their Master remained with them, nor afterwards, did they feel that they had enough faith, or enough of any grace of the Spirit, so as to preclude the necessity of asking for more. In like manner as they prayed for themselves, so did they pray for their converts. Peter prayed for the Christians to whom he addressed both his general epistles, that *grace*, as well as peace,

might be *multiplied* to them. After Paul had given thanks for the exemplary piety which appeared in the saints at Philippi, he adds, "And this I pray, that *your love may abound yet more and more.*" It seems then that these exemplary Christians had not yet been made *perfect in love*. And since this grace is the basis of the whole Christian character, so that faith worketh by love, and repentance and all the other graces work by love, a deficiency in love is incompatible with perfection in any of the Christian graces.

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## LECTURE IV.

### THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.

XI. *The representation which the Scriptures make of the Christian warfare is such as to render it very evident, that Christians are never in this life freed from the remains of their sinful nature.* The whole of their present life is represented as a *militant state*. In accordance with this representation, they are exhorted to take the whole armor of God, and to place themselves in the attitude of warriors on the field of battle. The Captain of their salvation has informed them, that Satan hath desired to have them, that he may sift them as wheat. But he assures them that the God of peace shall shortly bruise Satan under their feet. Thus while he encourages them with the

certain prospect of victory, and that within a short time, (for human life is short at the longest,) he reminds them that their warfare is not yet accomplished. When the Savior makes the promise of a crown of life to him that overcometh, he gives an intimation that the war will last as long as life shall last: "Be thou faithful unto *death*, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Some may imagine that, though the warfare with *Satan* should be protracted till the end of life, the warfare with our own corruptions may terminate at a much earlier date. A conflict with *Satan*, and a conflict with one's own corruptions, are not in their nature inseparable; for the Redeemer was acquainted with the one, without being acquainted with the other. In this respect, there was always a marked difference between him and his disciples; which difference he intimated when he said, "*The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me,*"—that is, 'nothing corrupt that he can lay hold on, to stir me up to transgress my Father's commandment.' It was not so when the prince of this world came to Peter, or to any other of his disciples. Nor do the Scriptures give us reason to expect it will ever be so while they remain in this world of temptation.

In times past it has been a prevailing sentiment in the Christian church, that a part of our spiritual warfare is *internal*; that the very seat of war is in the Christian's own heart; that his most dangerous foe is *the flesh*—the remains of corruptions unsubdued—answering to the remnant of the unsubdued Canaanites which were left in the land of promise. These,

you will remember, were to the Israelites pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, to vex them in the land wherein they dwelt. Num. 33: 55. I now ask, is the sentiment, to which I have referred, without foundation? Is there no such enemy as this described in the word of God? Are all our spiritual foes *foreign* enemies? This cannot be; for before the Christian arrives at a sinless state, (and our opponents will acknowledge that there are many who never arrive at such a state in the present life,) it is impossible that he should not be molested by this dreadful enemy,—the sin that dwelleth in him. Now if there be such a thing in renovated minds as indwelling sin, it must to such minds be a painful evil. We should therefore naturally expect to hear them say much about it, in the disclosures they make of their trials and conflicts. In the memoirs of some of the brightest lights the church has had since the days of the apostles, we find a very particular and large description of that inward foe, whose scriptural name is “the flesh.” But as these religious experiences are not our standard, but must, as well as our own, be tested by the oracles of God, we will first repair to those lively oracles, to obtain their decision on this important point.

The question now to be decided is, Do the Scriptures say any thing, and if any thing, what do they say, concerning an internal conflict in the Christian’s own breast—a conflict between sin and holiness in his own heart? If there is such a conflict, it cannot be possible that the book of inspiration, which must contain a perfect system of doctrinal, experimental and

practical religion, should have passed it over in silence. Seeing the Scriptures have done so much to disclose the chambers of imagery in the human heart, it would be incredible that they should say nothing of those enemies of Immanuel, which cause so much trouble in the town of Man-soul, after its first surrender to its rightful Sovereign. And since the word of God often brings into view the sorrows of his children, can we suppose that it has uniformly concealed that which above all things else must be the cause of their sorrows, namely, their own unsanctified affections? But if Christians do any of them, or even all of them, eventually arrive at sinless perfection in this life, there are important reasons why the Christian in his imperfect state of sanctification, having a mixed character, partly holy, and partly sinful, should be placed very prominently before us in the Scriptures.

First. Without this we should not be able to decide correctly concerning our spiritual state. If Christians have in this life a mixed character, I ought to know it, when I sit down to decide whether I am one of their number. If Christians have no such thing as selfishness and pride spring up in their hearts, the matter is decided at once, that I am not a Christian. But if the Christian of the Bible is one who is partly conformed, and yet not wholly conformed to the image of God, then may I indulge hope, provided I can discover in myself any affections which are of a disinterested and humble character. Is there in the heart of the Christian the company of two contending armies, or not? This question needs to be decided

by the word of God, to prepare the way for us to decide on our own character. But *that imperfect sanctification*, which is brought out to view by the Christian conflict, needed to be placed before us in the word of God, to detect the hope of the hypocrite, as well as to confirm that of the true believer. There are but few things which are more adapted to show the hypocrite, that he has built his house on the sand, than to have placed before him a full development of that struggle between holiness and sin, which exists in the heart of him who is born of the Spirit. Few books are more calculated to unsettle the false convert, than the *Life of David Brainerd*. And this memoir, you know, does very much to make us acquainted with the warfare which was carried on in the breast of that holy man, from the time he first came over on the Lord's side, until he left the world.

Secondly. We need the light of the Scriptures on this subject, for the sake of teaching our hands to war and our fingers to fight; that is, we need God to instruct us how to prosecute this holy war with success. If all the regenerated, while remaining in this world, or even any part of them, are but imperfectly sanctified; if they have totally opposite principles in their moral constitution, we need instruction relative to the best measures to be adopted, for weakening the one and strengthening the other. We need *example* as well as precept. And the example of one well skilled in this holy warfare is pre-eminently desirable.

Thirdly. If it is true that Christians, or quite a

majority of them, are but imperfectly sanctified, we ought not for a moment to indulge the thought, that the Scriptures would *conceal* this humiliating fact. It is not the manner of these holy writings to give flattering titles or false characters to men. If saints, even the best of them, are morally imperfect, it is for the honor of God's word to say so: else, when imperfection is discovered to belong to them, it would militate against the integrity of its character. It is to the honor of God's word, that it condemns all sin, and that it requires of the saints a perfection in holiness; but if they have not yet attained to perfection, it must be to the honor of this holy book to avow it.

You well know, my brethren, that there are passages of Scripture which have commonly been understood as descriptive of the conflict between holiness and sin in the heart of the Christian. I am aware that many are of opinion, that these passages describe the conflict between man's rational faculties and his sensual desires; or between an enlightened conscience and a wicked heart. That there is a conflict of this nature I will not deny. It is this which is probably alluded to, Rom. 2: 15. But what is going on in the heart of the imperfectly sanctified believer, must be more worthy to be noted in the Scripture of truth, since it is a conflict betwixt two opposite moral principles, and a conflict which can never cease until one of these principles is subdued, and the other reigns without a rival. It would therefore be very strange if this wonderful conflict, where sin and holiness, hell and heaven—the greatest moral opposites in the universe—are in a state of continual



strife for the mastery, as they must be in the hearts of the great majority of the heirs of the kingdom, (as our opponents will grant,) I say it would be strange, if the Scriptures should pass it over with scarcely an allusion to it. I think that, reasoning *a priori*, we should naturally have arrived at the conclusion, that a practical subject of such importance would not be passed in silence ; but that some of the holy men who were moved by the Holy Ghost to write the Scriptures, would be directed, not only to speak of this conflict, but to furnish us with a graphic description of it, warm from their own hearts. With all these reasons for expecting to find the internal warfare of the Christian distinctly noted in the Scripture of truth, let us take up the sacred volume and see what it has said relative to this subject.

The internal warfare of the Christian, as a general truth, is distinctly presented in Paul's epistle to the Galatians in these words: "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other ; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Flesh and spirit do not mean the same as the body and soul of the Christian ; but rather two active principles belonging to his soul, both of which are there at one and the same time. Each presents an obstacle to the full gratification of its antagonist. But since it is the earnest desire of Christians, as such, to become perfectly holy, when the apostle tells them they cannot do the things they would, he intends to apprise them of that moral impediment thrown in their way by



the lustings of the flesh, to prevent their reaching that degree of sanctification to which they aspire. This passage evidently supposes that the difficulty to which the apostle refers, is confined to neither place nor time. It is proper to consider it as a description of every regenerated man, let him live wherever and whenever he may: I say of every *regenerated man*; for none but such have both these contending principles within them. The unregenerate are all flesh and no spirit. They may have some conflict between flesh and conscience; but none between the flesh and the spirit.

In the passage which we have now been looking at, we see the Christian warfare (in the home department) briefly described. The two antagonistic principles are both named; their activity and contrariety to each other are stated, and the moral impossibility thence arising of Christians becoming at present what they wish to be, that is, sinless characters. Now was it not desirable, that this miniature of the Christian's hidden warfare with the evils of his own heart, should be somewhat expanded; and that it should be given to us in the more impressive form of an experience, narrated by one well acquainted with the conflict? And who was there among the apostles or inspired writers more fit to occupy this place, and perform this work, than such a one as Paul the aged? If the apostle, in any part of his Christian life, had an experimental knowledge of the internal part of the holy war, it is reasonable to believe that, in writing so much to the churches, he would somewhere allude to it. If he has alluded to it at all, has he

not done it in the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans? In this chapter he seems to give us an epitome of his experimental religion, from its commencement until the time when he wrote his epistle. It is worthy of notice, that in this chapter his object is to give us a view of his religion in its *internal exercises*, rather than in its external manifestations. I think he clearly narrates his conviction, his conversion, and his subsequent conflict with sin. Now all, except those who believe in the simultaneousness of regeneration and perfect sanctification, must acknowledge that these three things, namely, a deep conviction of sin by the coming of the law—such a change of character as is implied in becoming dead to the law, (as to any dependence on its power to save,) accompanied with an admiration of it as a holy rule—and this, followed by a whole life of vigorous conflict with remaining depravity,—constitute a sound and scriptural experience. Had such an experience been connected with the name of almost any other Bible saint, I am inclined to think there would not have been such an effort made to prove it to be a description of mere unregenerate exercises. Paul, by a kind of common consent, has been placed in the first rank of redeemed sinners. They therefore who believe that some of the saints do in this life arrive at sinless perfection, naturally look to him for the most illustrious example which the Scriptures can furnish of the truth of their doctrine. But if the seventh chapter of Romans is the apostle's *Christian* experience, it must be difficult to prove that he ever became a sinless character so long as he tabernacled

in the flesh. This compels them to interpret what has there been considered as a conflict in his renewed mind, to be a conflict which existed at an earlier date, while his mind was yet in its unrenewed state.

If there is such a thing as a struggle in the heart of the believer between nature and grace, (and such a struggle there must be until grace has the sole dominion,) it would seem, that what is described in the passage under consideration must be the very thing. But at the outset we meet with this objection: "It cannot be that the conflict, which the apostle describes, is that which is between nature and grace, because it would suppose grace to be always foiled and nature uniformly the victor." To this it may be replied: The difficulty is removed by taking into view the thing which grace, or the sanctified part of the soul, is reaching after, and constantly struggling to obtain, namely, a complete deliverance from sin. In regard to this desirable object, it is true that the flesh, during the present life, is uniformly successful to such a degree as to prevent its accomplishment; while at the same time grace is continually getting advantage of the flesh, and bringing it more and more into subjection. And even before the conflict ends, the gracious nature looks forward to a day when its victory will be complete.

Again, it is objected, that this cannot be the apostle's *Christian* experience, since it would not agree with the account which he gives of his unblamable character in other parts of his epistles. To the Thessalonians he writes thus: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and

unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." To this it may be replied, that such different representations of one's character are not contradictory. David said, "I am holy;" and yet he exclaimed, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." John Newton, in a letter to a friend, says, "The Lord supports me, yea, he owns me in my public work; he graciously keeps me in my outward walk: these are unspeakable mercies; though he appoints me a wearisome conflict with indwelling sin, still I ought to praise him." "I hope," said Brainerd, "the Lord gave me some true sense of divine things this day; but alas, how great and pressing are the remains of indwelling corruptions!"

The Christian, through grace, has a new nature; and it is very beautiful: but, until his sanctification becomes complete, he has also an old nature; and it is very deformed and loathsome. It is, moreover, an undoubted truth, that the more he has of the new nature, the more clearly does he discover the deformity and loathsomeness of his old nature. If then Paul was a saint of the first magnitude, (as we all suppose,) and if he was at the same time but imperfectly sanctified, (as many of us fully believe,) he was eminently the man to give us, in his own experience, a description of that warfare of the spirit against the flesh, in which every new-born soul is engaged.

Having obviated an objection or two which were thrown in our way, I am now ready to state reasons, which have been sufficient to satisfy my own mind,

that the seventh of Romans describes a conflict which existed in the mind of the apostle *after*, rather than before his conversion.

1. Previously to his entering on the description of the conflict in question, he informs us of an entire moral revolution that his mind had undergone. In the ninth verse of this chapter he gives a brief account of what, I think, must be his transition from nature to grace. He says, "I was alive without the law once:" that is, 'I was ignorant both of my entirely sinful character and my state of condemnation; which ignorance I now impute to my totally wrong views of God's law and to my natural love of sin.' "But when the commandment came, sin revived,"— 'when God by his Spirit made me acquainted with the spirituality of his law, the entire sinfulness of my heart was disclosed, and now, all those hopes of heaven, which were based on my own good deserts, were destroyed,'—"I died." His dying is manifestly put in contrast with his having been alive. It must therefore comprehend in it a moral renovation; being a death which had ended in life. This makes it parallel with Gal. 2: 20: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live." As evidence that the change which he had described was real and fundamental, he informs us how completely altered were his views and feelings in relation to the law of God. He now saw that, although the law was ordained unto life, it could secure the happiness of no subject of divine government who did not render to it a sinless obedience. He seems to express an entire approbation of the law, in all its strictness, as being, *holy, just, and*

*good.* I now ask, Are not such feelings towards the law of God satisfactory evidence of a genuine work of the Holy Spirit?

2. It is a circumstance worthy to be noticed that, in the description which the apostle gives of his conflict, he speaks uniformly in the present tense, whereas he had just before used the preterit tenses. In giving an account of his unawakened state, his legal convictions, and that consequent death which broke him off from his dependence on the law for life, he speaks of his exercises in the past time. Had the subsequent part of the chapter been nothing but his legal convictions protracted and expanded, it must have been altogether more natural that he should have continued to speak of them as of things which had been, but were now passed away. After passing the verse, in which we have supposed him to give us an account of his transition from death unto life, as soon as he has occasion to describe the exercises of his mind, as connected with the distinction of tense, he adopts the present, and uses it through the remaining part of the chapter.

3. If that cardinal doctrine of an orthodox creed, namely, *the total depravity of unrenewed nature*, is true, it furnishes a strong reason for believing that the warfare, which is described in this portion of Scripture, is the warfare of a *saint*, and not of a sinner. Can a sinner, unrecovered from his spiritual bondage, say in truth concerning sin, that he does *not allow* it,—that he *hates* it,—that he *would not* do it? Does such a one pant for deliverance from sin, and already give thanks to God for that deliverance

from it which is through Jesus Christ? Can any unrenewed man, in whatever state of alarm his mind may be, say, and that truly, I *consent* unto the law that is good,—I *delight* in the law,—and with the mind I myself *serve* the law of God? Should he make this representation of himself, while he is under awakenings, will he, after his conversion, adhere to it, and still give this favorable account of his unregenerate character? Would such a thorough and orthodox convert as Paul do it? What if a heathen philosopher, or a Pelagian heretic, give such a representation of the good feelings and desires of the natural man, does it follow that an inspired apostle, on whose writings the church is to depend for sound doctrine to the end of the world, would give such a flattering description of the unrenewed heart, where, according to the testimony of the Omniscient God, every imagination of the thoughts is only evil continually?

4. If this conflict had not been subsequent to the apostle's conversion, there could not have been the least propriety in his saying concerning that which he did amiss, "It is no more *I* that do it, but *sin* that dwelleth in me." In the regenerated man there are two distinct moral natures; so that what is pleasing to one is displeasing to the other. When therefore the apostle was speaking of himself as the Christian, the renovated character, he says, and that truly, I hate sin—I disallow it: it is not I, the renovated, the Christianized man, that do this evil thing, or have these evil affections. But would there be the least propriety for a man, whose heart is totally sinful, to



say concerning any sinful act he had done, or sinful thought he had indulged, It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me? In such a man there is but one moral nature, one class of affections and volitions, and these are all on the side of sin.

5. The parenthesis, which is found in the 18th verse, furnishes an argument to prove, that the conflict which the apostle was describing, did not take place while he was yet in his sins. Had he been describing himself as a sinner entire, why did he not say, without any restriction, I know that in me dwelleth no good thing? Why did he, after saying "In me," throw in this explanatory parenthesis, "that is, *in my flesh*," before he added, "dwelleth no good thing?" If he was describing any conflict which he had before he was created anew in Christ Jesus, he must have been at that very time, in a moral sense, nothing but flesh. But if we understand the apostle as describing a warfare which was subsequent to his conversion, then we discover a good reason for his making a break in the sentence by introducing this explanatory parenthesis: for, while he was expressing the fullest conviction of the entireness of his depravity as a fallen creature, he was not disposed to deny the fact, that, as the fruit of divine grace, there was now some good thing in him.

6. The *inward man*, which is here spoken of, proves the seat of the conflict to be the heart of the *saint*—not of the sinner. The sinner, as well as the saint, has a soul in distinction from his body; but, in the apostle's sense of the phrase, he has no inward man. I think it is evident, that by inward man he



intends the *new*, in distinction from the *old* man: and this is found in none of the children of Adam, except such as are born of God. When the apostle prays for the Ephesian saints, that God would grant them according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the *inner*, which is the same as the *inward* man, it is not a prayer for the expansion of their intellect, but for the sanctification of their heart. So when he comforts the saints at Corinth by saying, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," he manifestly refers to the improvement of their renovated character. This is well expressed by the daily renewal of their inward man. When he says, as in the passage now under consideration, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man," it would be perfectly unnatural to suppose that by the inward man he meant the soul, as distinguished from the body; for without the rational soul in man there could be no such thing as delight in the law, or aversion to it. But the apostle evidently puts the inward man in contrast with something else in him which did not delight in the law of God. At the close of the chapter, this contrasted thing is distinctly brought before us; and is there denominated the *flesh*, and the inward man is called the *mind*. He says, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

7. If this be not the Christian conflict, I see not how he, who is engaged in it, can be sure of an ultimate victory. Is there any *promised connection* between mere legal conviction and eternal salvation?

And is it not dangerous to the salvation of the convicted sinner, to apply the promises to his selfish efforts, while all the rebellion of his heart remains unsubdued? Yet if the conflict, described in the seventh of Romans, is that of an awakened unregenerate man, it teaches us that such a man may know, even before his conversion, that his salvation is sure. But let this be considered as the warfare of the enlisted soldier of the cross, and it all becomes intelligible; for to such a one victory is secured by promise, even from the very commencement of the war. Therefore while he is yet on the field of battle, having to contend with foes without and foes within, he is authorized to exclaim, "*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord—I thank him for that final and complete deliverance which he has promised to all who fight the good fight of faith.*"

8. It tends to confirm my belief that the conflict in question was that which succeeded the apostle's translation into the kingdom of Christ, because that, when it is thus understood, it harmonizes with other representations which he makes of his imperfect sanctification; particularly with those representations which we find in the third chapter of his epistle to the Philippians. In that chapter he expresses the most earnest desires to attain to a state of entire perfection; accompanied with a humble confession of his short comings. No one can read that chapter in connection with the one which contains an account of the conflict we are now considering, without perceiving that the apostle to the Romans, and the apostle to the Philippians, had not only the same name,

but the same striking features of character ; showing him to be a good soldier of Christ, intent on vanquishing every foe of his King, and at the same time deeply conscious that the rebellion of his own heart was not yet wholly subdued.

9. The view we have taken of this subject seems to be sustained by this argument: That, in supposing Paul's conflict, in the seventh of Romans, to be intended to acquaint us with that struggle betwixt holiness and sin which existed in his renovated mind, it makes his own experience perfectly to coincide with the description he gives, in the fifth of Galatians, of the Christian conflict in general: where he says, " For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," &c. But as I have in another place remarked on this general description of the Christian conflict, I now merely allude to the passage, as furnishing no inconsiderable proof that our views of the seventh of Romans are correct. If the apostle has described the Christian as one who has within himself two antagonistic principles, flesh and spirit, and these in perpetual conflict with each other, is it not natural to believe that such an inward strife as that which he has depicted in the seventh of Romans, should be intended for a particular illustration of that very conflict?

Lastly. Although we do not know (as God knows) who are true Christians, yet we do know that there have been a multitude among those that have exhibited the most satisfactory evidence of love to Christ, in different periods of the church, in different parts of the world, and belonging to different denomi-

nations of Christians, who have all united in telling us of inward conflicts, similar to those of which Paul speaks in the chapter before us. Now when all the other reasons which have been given, for believing that the conflict which he describes was subsequent to his conversion, are backed by this, *That the best Christians, whom the world has known in these later ages, have been deeply sensible of a similar struggle in their own breasts, during their earthly pilgrimage,* it becomes a reason which must and will have weight on the minds of those who are searching after the truth. If we have not questioned the piety of these later saints, either as to its genuineness or eminency, on account of their many groanings under a body of death which they could not throw off, it will not seem incredible to us, that such an eminent saint as Paul should have had through life such inward trials as those which he recounts in the passage we have been considering.

Now if we have shown from the Scriptures that the Christian conflict, even that part of it which is carried on between the flesh and the spirit, is common to all the militant church, and that the chiefest of the apostles was not exempted from bearing his part in it so long as he remained below, we have thereby furnished a convincing argument to establish the point, that Christians in this life are never made free from moral imperfection.

XII. *The pointed condemnation of those who claim to have risen above sinful imperfection, is decisive proof that the word of God considers no man as hav-*

*ing a right to make such a claim.* If sinless characters are to be found among the children of men, then a claim to rank with that class can of itself constitute no evidence against the man who makes it. It can amount to no proof that he is not what he claims to be, that is, a perfect saint; much less, that he is no saint at all. Had there been such a thing as a sinless character on earth, it would not have been consistent for Job to make the declaration he did, when he said, "If I say I am perfect, it shall prove me perverse." Job 9: 20 If there had been a man in the world, at that period when Job lived, who could claim to be perfect, he was the man; for the Lord had declared, "there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil." In that sense in which God claimed perfection for him, he certainly would not have disclaimed it. But as to perfection, in its completest sense, denoting an entire freedom from sin, he disclaimed all pretension to it; intimating that an opposite conduct would have proved him to be nothing better than a hypocrite. From this I think we may reasonably infer, that on this subject Job had adopted the sentiment which was afterwards expressed by Solomon, namely, that *there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.*

It would seem that a claim to sinless perfection, had not ceased to be reckoned among the symptoms of a perverse heart in the days of the apostle John; who, in the first chapter of his first epistle, makes this declaration: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." To

deceive ourselves, and not to have the truth in us, are expressions which clearly describe a graceless condition. Such is declared to be the condition of those who say that they have no sin. But who are they that say this? Not those who say that they never sinned, but those who assert that their sanctification is complete. It is not known that there have ever been any of the professed disciples of Christ who made the assertion, "We have *never* sinned:" but it is well known that there have been, in different periods of the church, quite a number, who lay claim to an entire freedom from sin, by the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. That this is the false claim which the apostle supposed some would make, may be learned from the natural import of the words which he uses; and the history of the church is calculated to convince us that this is the evil which he designed to expose. There is a passage in the 30th chapter of the book of Proverbs, which seems to be of the same import with those two that we have already considered. I refer to the passage which says, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up." It seems reasonable to believe that the generation that are pure in their own eyes, while they are not washed from their filthiness, are those who fancy themselves to be washed from *all* their filthiness; and the very circumstance of their indulging this vain conceit, proves the fact that they have never been washed in the laver of regeneration. The same characters that fancy

themselves clean, while they have never been washed, seem to constitute the generation concerning whom it is said, "O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up." What can evince a higher degree of pride and self-conceit, than for creatures to fancy themselves, in a moral sense, entirely clean, when they are in fact entirely filthy? A claim to be pure in some degree, is no proof that we have not been washed in that fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness; but they who are pure in their own eyes, in the sense which is here condemned, show that they have never been to this sacred fountain for cleansing.

The Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray, seems to have been immaculate in his own view. He recounted his good deeds, but made no confession of sin. He had no mercy to implore. Did not our blessed Lord present this character to our view, for the purpose of warning us against self-ignorance and a high conceit of our spiritual attainments? While the Pharisee thought himself a model of perfection, Christ holds him up to our view as a character wholly devoid of moral excellence.

XIII. *The contrast which the Scripture draws between the church in its militant and triumphant states, furnishes proof that in the first of these states its members are all sinfully imperfect.* The church in its militant state on earth, in distinction from its triumphant state in heaven, is imperfect in two respects.

1. It has graceless members which are wholly



devoid of a principle of holiness. In heaven it will have but one class of members ; and these will all be such as are partakers of the heavenly calling. When the Bridegroom comes, the wise and foolish virgins will be separated. The unfruitful branches, which have a mere visible union with the Vine, will be taken away, and the branches which remain will all be of a fruitful character. At the marriage supper of the Lamb on earth, there are guests who are destitute of the wedding garment ; but at the marriage supper in heaven, no such guests will be admitted.

2. The church on earth is imperfect as to the degree of sanctification which is attained by its approved members ; whereas the sanctification of the church in heaven is complete. They who shall be accounted worthy to obtain a place in the church triumphant, though possessed of no different character from that which distinguished them from the ungodly in this world, will then display this amiable character to perfection. Here the flesh and the spirit keep up their conflict by continually lusting against each other ; but there the flesh, being subdued, will never more lust against the spirit. Grace will reign without a rival forever. Do you ask, where is the proof that a difference, which is made by imperfect and perfect sanctification, exists between the church on earth and in heaven ? I would say,

First. That this difference is analogous to that which is made by its having in the one state two distinct classes of members, and in the other but one. It is granted on all hands, that the church on earth is composed of regenerated and unregenerated mem-



bers; but that in heaven it is composed wholly of those who are regenerated. It is also conceded by most of those who adopt the sentiment, that sinless perfection may be found in the church below, that it is by no means common to all its regenerated members. Now, if God suffers the regenerated members to remain imperfect in their sanctification for a while, is it not rational to believe that so long as he suffers the two classes of members to remain together in the church, he should also suffer the two natures—sin and holiness—to remain together in the hearts of his saints? The sentiment would be manifestly a discordant one, which should suppose that in heaven, where the sinful members are all excluded, its holy members should still retain their sinful imperfection. Nor does it appear very rational to believe, while the church is in its earthly state, where the holy and unholy members are mingled together, that there should be at the same time a separating line between its holy members, as great as that which is made by sinless perfection and sinful imperfection. If that part of the family of Christ which is in heaven is free, not only from sinful members, but also from all sinful imperfection in its holy members; and if that part of his family which is upon earth, is free from neither, (and this is a conceded point,) is it not reasonable to believe that, as soon as he sees fit to bring to perfection any of his family on earth, he should remove them from earth to heaven, from a world of sin to a world of holiness?

Secondly. Leaving the argument derived from analogy, let us now repair more directly to the word

of God. Here we find such a contrast between the church below and the church above, as will not permit us to consider the church below as perfect in any of its members. "That he might present it to himself," said Paul, "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." This implies, that in its present state the church has spots and wrinkles and many such things; but when he shall present it in its perfected state, it will have nothing of this nature cleave to it any more. The thing intended by Christ's presenting the church to himself, may be learned from a passage in the epistle of Jude: "Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." The place where the church will be presented *faultless* will be heaven, "the presence of his glory." This implies that the same church, those very men and women, who here were faulty, will there be faultless.

The contrast between saints on earth and saints in heaven, is placed before us in such a passage as that in the last chapter of Peter's first epistle: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you." This imports, that in this world believers are in a suffering, imperfect, unestablished, weak, unsettled condition; but that in heaven their condition will be quite reversed—their sufferings will be over; they will become perfect, be established, strengthened and settled, without the least fluctuation any more forever.

What a contrast between the present and the future state of the saints is implied in this passage: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet *shortly*." The space between the militant and triumphant states of the church is short; but the difference between the two is great. Here they are exposed to be worried by the tempter, and to be drawn into sin; but in heaven they are beyond the reach of his temptations: and were it possible for him to approach them, he would now find them, as he found their Savior, having nothing in them favorable to his diabolic designs. In the epistle to the Ephesians the saints on earth are compared to children, and those in heaven to such as have arrived to the stature of a *perfect man*. Before they come to maturity, some children grow faster, and are taller than others of the same age; but none of them have reached their full stature. So on earth there are different statures among the saints, but none of them have come to maturity, none of them are men. In heaven they will still differ, as one star differs from another in lustre: but they will all be perfectly, though not equally luminous.

In the 12th of Hebrews we are presented with a view of the heavenly Jerusalem, where there is an innumerable company of angels, and associated with them are "the spirits of just men made perfect." "The *spirits* of just men," are their souls, after being released from their bodies; as the spirits in prison, spoken of by Peter, are the souls of the wicked in hell. The expression, The spirits of just men *made perfect*, very naturally implies that perfection was not

predicable of them so long as they continued in their embodied state. It supposes their holy character to have commenced while the body was their tabernacle, but that it was never made perfect, till the time came for them to put off this tabernacle. Here we see an entire contrast between saints on earth and in heaven. On earth the renovation of their spirits takes place, and progress in holiness is made ; but in heaven it appears in its perfect state. The passage we are now considering harmonizes with one which we have already considered under another head, namely, that relating to the path of the just which resembles the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day. The perfect day doubtless means the heavenly state, where the spirits of just men are made perfect. These passages not only show a contrast between the church on earth and the church in heaven, considered as a collective body ; but they plainly describe a contrast between the character of its just men, as that character appears, first during their pilgrimage on earth, and then in their glorified state in heaven.

If the contrast between the saints on earth and in heaven were not as great as between imperfect and perfect sanctification, I can see no reason why the Sanctifier should not be represented as finishing his work during this life, as well as at the close of it. But this is not the scriptural representation, as appears in the following passage : " Being confident of this very thing, that he that hath begun a good work in you, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." This passage supposes that the Spirit of God, when

he has begun to transform a sinful into a holy creature, will never abandon his work, but that he will ultimately bring it to perfection. It also supposes that the work of transformation, which he begins at the crisis of the new birth, he never finishes until the day of Jesus Christ. "The day of Jesus Christ," when applied to the church as a whole, is the day of Christ's appearing at the end of the world; but in application to its individual members, it is the day when he comes to call them from their probationary to their fixed and enduring state. See Luke 12: 40. Jam. 5: 9. Revel. 16: 15.

"For I know whom I have believed," said Paul, "and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against *that day*." Not but that he would still need the Keeper of Israel to preserve him from apostacy, but he looked forward to a day, worthy to be distinguished by being called "*that day*," when the work of deliverance from sin, which had been going on for years, would be brought to a state of completion. Peter evidently had his eye on the same complete deliverance from sin, when he said concerning the subjects of grace, "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation"—that is, unto a perfection of that salvation, that deliverance from sin, which was begun in them when they were first called out of darkness into God's marvellous light. In this view of matters, we can see that it is proper to stir up the minds of those who have been long in the school of Christ, by telling them, "Now is your *salvation* nearer than when ye believed." Salvation has a beginning, a progression,

and a completion. The completion is what this passage intends by their salvation. In this sense of the word, the salvation of believers is at the end of their pilgrimage; and to that end they are continually approaching. The contrast between their present and their future state is therefore as great as between salvation begun and salvation completed.

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## LECTURE V.

A RECAPITULATION OF THE SCRIPTURE ARGUMENTS  
WHICH SUSTAIN THE DOCTRINE OF IMPERFECTION;  
WITH CONCLUDING REMARKS.

WE have now taken a summary view of the Christian character, as it is in a variety of ways placed before us in the holy Scriptures. And do not these various representations, when brought together, produce a full conviction that the Christian character always falls short of sinless perfection; that *imperfect sanctification* is the highest attainment of the saints on earth? We began by examining the arguments which are made use of by our theological antagonists to prove the opposite doctrine. And was it not shown that their arguments entirely fail of proving the point for which they are adduced? We then proceeded to search the Scriptures, to see what were their representations concerning the character of "the heirs of promise" during their minority on earth.

First, We looked at the biographical sketches of the saints, as they are noted in "the Scripture of truth," even of some of the best of those whose names are there recorded. We saw palpable evidence of imperfect sanctification in such men as Abraham, Moses, David, Hezekiah; and even in such men as the apostles of the Lamb. — Secondly, In accordance with the unfavorable particulars found in these biographical sketches, we heard the Scripture make the broad assertion, that there is no man that sinneth not; that there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not. — In the next place, we took a view of some of the best among the excellent of the earth, and that in their nearest approaches to the God of holiness. In this situation we saw that they were uncommonly sensible of their great sinfulness in His sight; not only of their past, but of their then present sinfulness. — We then took a view of those covenants of promise, the one of which was made between the Persons of the Trinity before the foundation of the world, in relation to the chosen seed; and the other made with the elect themselves after their effectual calling. In the structure of both these covenants we perceived that the sinful imperfection of the subjects of grace, during their sojourn in this lower world, was contemplated as a fact. — The next thing we noticed was the provision which God had made for the exercise of discipline in his church while it should remain on earth; rendering it the duty of his people to reprove the sin which they should see in their brethren, and to confess their



faults one to another. — After noticing the discipline that God had established for the purpose of purifying his church, we were led to take notice of the discipline which he himself made use of for improving the character of his people. We saw that his object in afflicting them, was to take away their sin; and since their afflictions were continued to the end of their life, we were led to the conclusion, that to the end of their life they needed their influence to purge away their dross. — Next, we were led to contemplate those inculcations which relate to self-examination, as a duty requiring great thoroughness, to enable Christians to determine whether they are in the faith. These inculcations seem to intimate that Christians have something in their hearts besides pure holiness, and that this creates a difficulty in forming a decision concerning the genuineness of their religion. — We then examined some of the exhortations that the Scriptures address to those who are born of God; which exhortations manifestly imply their remaining depravity. We found the very best of them were exhorted to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God: and to lay aside every weight, and their easily besetting sin. — In harmony with such exhortations, we found that the Christian character was described as *progressive*, advancing from a seed to a plant or tree, and from the first dawn of light to the perfect day. — We next took notice of such prayers as are prescribed for God's children, as being suited to their condition in this life: also, of many of those prayers



they offered, which are recorded in the Scriptures; and we found them to be adapted to the condition of saints whose sanctification is yet imperfect. — We were then led to take a scriptural view of the Christian warfare. We saw that the Christian's *heart* is represented as being emphatically the seat of the war, the place where the conflict is the most severe and lasting. This led us to the conclusion, that though the old man is crucified, he is not yet dead and lifeless. — We also thought we could see in the word of God a pointed condemnation of all pretensions to a sinless purity, as though it proved such pretenders to be ignorant of their own hearts. — And last of all, we took a view of the contrast which the Scriptures draw between the church on earth, and the church in heaven; between the saint on earth, and the saint in heaven. And here we saw that the difference was as great as between a state of progress and that of full attainment—as great as between spirits partially cleansed, and spirits made perfect in holiness—as great as between a state of severe conflict, and one of eternal triumph.

Now all these particulars, like the different notes in a good piece of music, harmonize. They all agree to support the doctrine of Christian imperfection; but with the doctrine of sinless perfection they have no agreement. If a threefold cord is not easily broken, a manifold cord must be stronger still.

## PRACTICAL REMARKS.

1. If the saints are all sinfully imperfect in this life, then as long as they live, their desert of punishment, instead of diminishing, is continually augmenting. Sin is a guilty, ill-deserving thing, whether committed by fallen angels or fallen men, whether committed by sinners unregenerate or regenerate. And the sins committed by the latter have this aggravation, that they are a violation of some obligations which are peculiar. The saints, it is true, have something in their character by which they radically differ from sinners—something which is exceedingly lovely. (Dan. 9: 23.) But just so far as they are yet unsanctified, and of course sinful, they are unlovely: for sin is none the less hateful for being found in the same individual where holiness is also found. There is indeed no other sin in the universe, if no greater in degree, which appears so vile to the child of God as that which he discovers in his own heart. If saints remain sinfully imperfect to the very end of life, their desert of hell is manifestly greater at the time when they are received up to glory, than at any antecedent period of their existence. This must be true, even if they have been growing in grace ever so constantly and rapidly from the time of their first espousals. They have been growing more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; and yet, by reason of their remaining sinfulness, they have more and more deserved to be cast into outer darkness. As the most perfect punctuality in the payment of new contracts

would not cancel an old debt, so the return of a rebel to perfect loyalty and obedience, would not do away the guilt incurred by his rebellion ; much less would his return to an imperfect loyalty and obedience do it away. Under the mediatorial government of Jehovah, we are assured, that where there is a real change of character, where the rebel against his government has submitted, and yielded to the requisitions of the gospel, his salvation is secured. He is no longer considered as an heir of wrath, exposed to the penalty of the law, although it is true, that after this moral revolution, his *ill-desert* not only continues, but, by reason of remaining depravity and new transgressions, is greatly augmented.

This view of the subject helps us to see why it is so common for dying saints to speak disparagingly of their whole life, and of what they have done in the service of God. In point of merit, they see it to be worse than nothing. Considered as the fruit of the Spirit, as evidential of their union to Him who is the Lord our righteousness, and as the means of furthering his cause in the earth, they look back to their Christian life with some satisfaction : but when they place it beside the demands of the law and the example of Christ, they cry out, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

2. With the subject relating to the moral imperfection of Christians before us, it may be neither improper nor useless to raise the inquiry, *Why does God never bring any of his children to a state of perfect holiness in the present world?* In attempting to answer this inquiry, I would say,

First. It is not because the thing is impossible; for in heaven he will bring them all to such a state. Nor ought we to deem it beyond the power of God to form perfect characters on *earth*. Our first parents were for a while free from sin, though they lived upon earth, and tabernacled in bodies of clay. The Savior, clothed in flesh like ourselves, spent more than thirty years on earth without sin.

Secondly. It is not because God does not prefer, in itself considered, the perfect to the partial sanctification of his children. "This," says the apostle, "is the will of God, even your sanctification." Nothing short of their perfect sanctification can render them perfectly pleasing in His sight, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil or to look on iniquity. Every vestige of depravity in their hearts is displeasing to God; but their advancement in the divine life he beholds with great satisfaction.

Thirdly. It is through no deficiency in the atonement that the saints do not become perfectly sanctified in the present life. The blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse from all sin, even in the present life, if God saw fit to make this application of it. Nor is it through any deficiency in the atonement that the elect are not called into the kingdom at an earlier period of life than they are. It was owing to no lack in the provision made for the salvation of sinners, that Paul was not converted years earlier than he was. While on the part of Paul, it was a criminal thing that he was not actively promoting the cause of Christ at the very time when he was doing all he could to hinder it; yet, on the part of

God, it was not only right, but consummately wise, that he was suffered to remain in the ranks of the enemy until the very day that Jesus met him on his way to Damascus.

When Christ informed his disciples that Lazarus was dead, he added, "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." If it was consistent with the perfect benevolence of Christ, that he should keep away from Bethany, until Lazarus was laid in his grave, was it not for the same reason consistent, that he should keep away from Paul, and suffer him to go all the lengths he did, before he interposed to turn his feet into the path of life? Do not the Scriptures lead us to believe that all the wrath of this persecutor was made to praise God, and that the remainder of his wrath was restrained? Ps. 76: 10. When we read the interesting narrative of Joseph and his brethren, we attach no blame to him for keeping them so long ignorant of the fact that he was their brother; because we clearly perceive that it was something quite different from an unkind relentless spirit which prompted him to pursue this course. And certainly the Savior would not have delayed to make himself known to Saul the persecutor, if the interests of the church would have been better subserved by his earlier conversion. Now if we can see how it was consistent with that fullness of provision which Christ made by his death, and that unbounded benevolence which ever reigns in his heart, that he should so long delay to translate this chosen vessel from the power of darkness into his own kingdom, where is there any diffi-

culty in seeing how it could be consistent both with the fulness of the provision he had made, and the fulness of benevolence which he possessed, that he should delay to effect the perfect sanctification of this servant, and indeed that of the whole company of believers, to a period subsequent to their conversion ; or that he should never effect it until the very close of their probationary state ?

From the fulness of the provision made by the atonement, we can no more infer the perfect sanctification of the saints on earth, or the perfect sanctification of a single individual, than we can from the same premises prove the salvation of all men. In view of this ample provision, all men have the offer of salvation, and are laid under strong obligation to believe and be saved. But neither the offer of salvation nor the obligation we are under to embrace it, are sufficient to produce that faith which will save the soul. Men never believe to the saving of the soul, until special grace interposes to cause them to yield a compliance with their obligations. It is doubtless the duty of all saints (and of all sinners too) to be perfectly holy : but the saints will advance in holiness no faster than they are brought along by the effectual operations of the Divine Spirit. They will work out their salvation with fear and trembling ; but this working of theirs will be the effect of God's working in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure. If it is not the good pleasure of God to exert influence enough on the hearts of his saints, to raise them to a state of perfect holiness while they remain on earth, it is very certain they will not rise

to that state. His determinations relative to this matter are to be learned from his word. And do not the considerations which have been presented in these Lectures, make it evident that he has determined not to put forth that degree of influence which, as to perfection of character, will make his saints below equal to those above?

The question now returns,—Why has God determined thus? Why does he never raise any of his children to a state of perfect holiness in this world? As a general answer to the question we are ready to say, without fear of mistake, it would not be *wise* for him to do it. There are many things that God has power to do which he never does; and things which, by themselves considered, he would delight in doing, and yet he does them not; for he sees it would not be the part of wisdom to do them. He might do that which would increase the present good, both moral and natural, that is, the present holiness and happiness of the intellectual system, and yet this be inexpedient to be done on account of its ultimate influence. The plans of the Infinite Mind are far-reaching, running on through an endless duration. “Whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever:” its influence always reaches to eternity. His works are manifold; yet that is no more than a just acknowledgment which the Psalmist makes when he says, “In *wisdom* hast thou made them *all*.” By saying concerning all God’s works of creation and providence, that they are done in wisdom, is meant that they will all conspire to make the most perfect display of the glory of God; and that in doing this they will give exist-



ence to a most perfect kingdom of loyal and happy subjects, whose loyalty and happiness shall be secured forever; thus constituting "a kingdom which cannot be moved."

If it is certain that God has determined not to raise the church, while on earth, to a state of perfect holiness, we know that his glory will ultimately be better promoted by this than by a different arrangement: also, that the church, taking into view the whole duration of its existence, will be rendered a more perfect and blessed society. We pretend not to be able to find out the Almighty unto perfection; or to discover all the reasons which have influenced his holy mind to fix upon that plan of operation which leaves his militant church in a state of moral imperfection: but I think it quite obvious, that it will have this one effect, to render the greatness and deep-rootedness of our depravity much more apparent than would have been done by a different arrangement. According to the present arrangement, the Christian, after spending days and years in striving against the sin of his nature, and seeking to eradicate it from his heart, finds that it is still there, that it is deep-rooted, and springing up as it were spontaneously on every occasion; he therefore cries out, "Who can understand his errors?" Who can fully know the depths of wickedness which are in his own heart?

While we remain wholly under the power of sin, (and this we do until we know the grace of God in truth,) we are to a great degree ignorant of its vile nature and ill desert. But as soon as we come out from under its power, and commence a war with it,

we begin to discover its malignity; and to the very end of this war our experimental knowledge of its malignity is constantly increasing. There is no other way in which this knowledge could be so well obtained. *Experience is the best schoolmaster.* That knowledge which is gained by experience, is of all others the most impressive and permanent in its influence. The knowledge which the Christian is now acquiring, let it be remembered, is designed to exert a powerful influence on all his future existence, and that existence is to have no end. There can be no doubt that a great amount of moral means will be requisite to perpetuate and perfect the holiness and blessedness of an eternal state. And there is every reason to believe, that *that most impressive knowledge of depravity*, which is acquired during our militant state, will exert a great and an abiding influence.

(1.) It will exert this influence in promoting *humility*. Pride is infinitely offensive to God. "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." "He knoweth the proud afar off." Pride unfitted the devil and his angels to remain in heaven: and if they were expelled from heaven on account of their pride, we may be assured that none of our race will be permitted to fill their vacant seats, until we become divested of this vile affection. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," said the Savior, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Their humility must rise to perfection, and remain so forever, to qualify them to be permanent inhabitants of the heavenly world. There can be no doubt that God has power to raise his saints to perfection at an earlier date than he

does. But were he thus to exert his power, would he lay a foundation equally broad for the depth and permanence of their humble character? It is the nature of a sinful heart to inflate us; this we know; and yet there is nothing else which is the occasion of so much self-abasement. I believe there is no Christian whose own experience will not help him to understand what Erskine meant, in the Gospel Sonnets, when he says,

“ Humility makes my pride to grow,  
And pride aspiring brings me low.”

We are informed that “Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart.” David humbled himself for that pride of heart which stirred him up to number the people: and in view of all his other sins was he humbled in the dust; especially in view of those which were subsequent to his adoption into the family of God. Now if there is no other way by which the redeemed of the Lord can obtain so clear and impressive a sight of the exceeding sinfulness of their natures, as by having their corruptions driven out by little and little, like the Canaanites from the holy land, then no other process is so well adapted to prepare them for the everlasting humility of the heavenly state.

(2.) That increasing conviction of sin, which is the result of the Christian conflict, will render *Christ more precious* to his redeemed people through the ages of eternity. The more they become acquainted with themselves as self-ruined sinners, the more they

will prize Him whose name is called JESUS, because he came to save his people from their sins. The longer and more earnestly they have groaned under the burden of indwelling sin, the more precious will the Redeemer appear in their sight. It was in view of the Canaanites left in the land, after Jericho's walls had been thrown down—in other words, it was in view of the corruptions left in the heart, after its renovation by the Holy Ghost—that Paul exclaimed, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And this insupportable burden helped him to a sweeter discovery of the preciousness of his Redeemer than he could otherwise have had. In view of prospective deliverance, he says, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Had the apostle's sense of the weight and offensiveness of the body of death, which he was carrying about, been less clear and impressive, Christ would have appeared less precious in his eyes. Though the whole redeemed family will join heartily in giving thanks to God for the unspeakable gift of a Savior, they cannot all have an equally impressive sense of the magnitude of the gift. *They* will love most to whom most has been forgiven: or rather, they will love the most, who have the most impressive sense of the greatness of the debt which has been forgiven them. And those Christians whose convictions of sin have been the clearest and most constant, and whose struggles against it have been the most vigorous, will doubtless have the most impressive sense of the greatness of the debt.

(3.) This increasing sense of the deep-rootedness

of sin, which is learned by a protracted conflict with it, serves to prepare the redeemed to appreciate more highly the gift of the Holy Spirit. Unawakened sinners, when they resolve that hereafter they will become Christians, make their resolutions in dependence on their own strength. When they are brought under awakenings and convictions, they begin to see that the atonement for sin, which Christ's death has provided for them, is not the only thing they need to save them from the ruins of the fall. They now perceive that they are the subjects of a moral impotence, an entire and obstinate indisposition to come to the Savior for salvation. This prepares the way for them to see their need of the Spirit, to impart to them a holy character. Their conviction of dependence on the Spirit of God for holiness of character, is now much clearer than it was before; yet even now it is very imperfect in comparison to what it will be after a long and painful conflict with indwelling sin. This enlarges and elevates their views of the power, grace and faithfulness of the Sanctifier. The Holy Spirit, in the character of the Sanctifier, appears more than ever before to be pre-eminently *the gift*, which the death of Christ procured for the sinful sons of men. In comparison with this, they can see that all the riches of the earth would have been but a contemptible gift. To be made the temples of the Holy Ghost—to have Him take up his everlasting residence in them, to give perfection and stability to that renovated character which he has originated in their souls, and thus to perpetuate their union with

the Redeemer, and their fellowship with the holy universe—what can be more glorious! what can be more worthy of eternal thanksgiving and praise!

(4.) The divine arrangement which we have been contemplating cannot fail to have an influence on the ransomed of the Lord, in causing them more highly to prize and relish the holiness of heaven, than they would have done had their perfect sanctification been cotemporary with their new birth. Before they were born of God they never were burdened with sin as a *moral* evil, as a transgression of the divine law. But after this merciful change, it becomes their greatest burden. If then the work of sanctification had been completed in them as soon as it was commenced, their sense of the favor of an everlasting deliverance from all the defiling influence of sin, would have been comparatively feeble: but after they have been for years annoyed with the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the spirit, they must be prepared to appreciate the greatness of the mercy they have received in being made free, perfectly and forever free, from the law of sin and death. After so many fluctuations, how will they prize a confirmation in holiness! After such a long war with their internal foes, the corruptions of their own hearts, how grateful it must be to see them all subdued, accompanied with this assurance, that these enemies, which have given them so much molestation during their earthly pilgrimage, they shall see again no more forever! Sweet will be the heavenly rest to such wearied minds. That spiritual conflict, which results from the imperfect sanctification of be-

lievers in this life, must exert a great and lasting influence to increase their relish for the perfect holiness and tranquillity of the heavenly state.

3. If sinful imperfection is common to the whole company of godly ones on earth, such imperfection cannot, of itself, constitute decisive evidence against the godly sincerity of any professor of religion. It is not unfrequently the case, that a single deviation from the right path is considered sufficient to prove one's profession to be hypocritical. But is it right to adopt a principle which would place Abraham and Moses and David, and other approved characters of the Bible, among the enemies of the Lord? When those who turn away from the path of rectitude, turn back again, hold on their way, and become stronger and stronger, we have no right to pronounce them graceless men. When our fellow Christians, in their course of life, appear to have respect unto all God's commandments, we should not be ashamed to own them as brethren, though it be evident that their obedience falls short of sinless perfection. Nor are we required to consider *ourselves* to be in a graceless condition, merely because we discover in our hearts and lives something which is not as it should be. If it were made necessary in order to prove our religion to be genuine, that we discover nothing in our hearts but holy affections, and nothing in our lives but holy actions, it would be impossible for us to entertain a hope—certainly, an assurance of hope—while we remain upon earth. But the thing required to give us a hope, and even an assurance of hope, is not that we discover a perfection of holiness



in our hearts, but that we discover its existence : and that we ascertain it to be *true holiness*, and not its counterfeit.

While a perfect deliverance from sin must preclude the necessity of such a scrutinizing examination of ourselves, as that which the Scriptures inculcate ; yet if this inculcation be strictly regarded, something short of a perfect deliverance from sin may furnish us not only with a hope, but with an assurance of hope. Since there is an infallible connection, according to the covenant of grace, between sanctification, in its incipient state, and its permanence and ultimate perfection, so far as we can be assured that the work, which is begun within us, is the true work of the Spirit, just so far we can be assured that we shall at length be redeemed from all our iniquities. If then we can be sure that the love of God which we possess, is that which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost ; that the repentance which we exercise, is that which needeth not to be repented of ; that our faith in Christ is that which worketh by love, purifieth the heart, and is productive of good works ; that our love to the brethren, is complacency in holy characters ; that our love to our enemies is unfeigned benevolence ; and, in fine, that we have all the graces of the Spirit planted in our hearts ; then may we know that He that hath begun a good work in us will perform until the day of Jesus Christ. But since there are affections of a contrary character remaining within us, the most scrutinizing self-examination needs to be

kept up, lest some of us should think ourselves to be something when we are nothing.

Lastly. Before quitting this subject, it may be proper to remark, that the sweetest acquiescence in God's arrangement relative to the present imperfection of the saints, implies no complacency in sin, or indifference concerning sanctification. We may have a complacency in God's holy management of this unholy thing, without exercising the least complacency in sin itself. You may be pleased with God's plan in suffering Paul to remain a persecutor, until the day that the light of heaven struck him blind, and yet not be at all pleased with his persecuting malicious character. You may also be pleased with the divine arrangement which kept him, many years after his conversion, groaning under a body of spiritual death, without its implying any complacency in that indwelling sin which was the cause of his groans. Furthermore, you may sweetly acquiesce in the divine arrangement in relation to your own imperfect sanctification; and yet this acquiescence not originate from the want of a relish for holiness, or from any indifference towards that perfection which excludes sin. The less sin we have, and the nearer we approach the mark of perfection, the greater will be our acquiescence in this, as well as in all the other counsels of the all-wise God. Such acquiescence has no tendency to check our efforts to grow in grace.

"The Israel of God," when they shall have reached their heavenly rest, will doubtless derive much in-

struction from a review of the way wherein they have been led. They will be convinced that the trials of the way, not excepting those which were the result of their imperfect sanctification, were just what they needed, to prepare them to enjoy their eternal rest. They will see that, while on their part, it was highly culpable that their unbelief should render it necessary for them to be kept so long from their promised inheritance, and be led through such a howling wilderness; on the part of Jehovah, their God, it was all done in wisdom and faithfulness. They will see, that though

“He led their march far wandering round,  
'Twas the right path to Canaan's ground.”

Probably no truth will be more clear to their enlarged and purified minds than this: that in those very things wherein they meant and did evil, God meant it for good. Gen. 50: 20. The saints in heaven will never have any more complacence in moral evil on account of the good which a God of holiness shall have educed from it. They will never think any better of themselves as the transgressors of a good law, from the circumstance, that God has made use of their unrighteousness to commend his righteousness, as well as to increase the humility and loveliness of their own renovated character. In view of their deliverance from sin and ruin, they will all be prepared to exclaim with heart-felt gratitude, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake.”

## LECTURE VI.

## THE SPIRITUALITY AND EXTENT OF THE DIVINE LAW.

For we know that the law is spiritual.—ROM. 7: 14.

THE word of God is called the sword of the Spirit. It is also represented to be very sharp—sharper than any other sword, even sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the dividing asunder of soul and of spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discern-er of the thoughts and intents of the heart. A metallic sword may destroy the life of a rebel, but it leaves the rebellion of his heart untouched. It may lay open to inspection the internal parts of the body; but the sword of the Spirit does more than this, for it discloses the secrets of the soul. It is a discern-er of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It discovers to us not only all we ever did, but all that we ever thought; the motives by which we have been actuated, and the character of these motives.

The word of God is calculated to give pain to the unregenerate man—the enemy of God—by showing him that his character is totally bad, and his condition very dangerous. It also continually administers reproof to the subjects of grace for all that which remains in them that is hostile to the holy law of God. Since it is the sharpness of the Spirit's sword which causes it to give pain to depraved minds, it is no more than what might have been expected that

this sword, when left in our keeping, would undergo material changes ; that it would have its point broken and its edge turned, to prevent, if possible, its piercing so deep as to expose all the secret wickedness of the heart. But since the very thing which renders the word superlatively valuable is its sharpness, its adaptation to expose, condemn, and destroy every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, it is a duty which we owe, not only to the Author of the inspired word, but to ourselves, to leave the point and edge of the Spirit's sword unblunted. Praying that God would not suffer me to blunt the sword of the Spirit, nor suffer you, my hearers, to wish me to do it, I proceed to an examination of the passage which I have selected for my text. "For we know that the law is spiritual."

What is meant by *the law* ?

What by its being called *spiritual* ?

How is its spirituality *known* ?

A correct answer to these three inquiries will make us acquainted with the import of the text.

I. What is meant by *the law* ? The law which is here described is of *divine* origin. Before the chapter closes it is more than once called "the law of God." God has other laws besides this. He has a law by which he governs a world of matter : but a world of minds requires a law of a very different nature to govern them. This is usually denominated a *moral* law ; being designed for none but moral agents, that is, creatures who are capable of possessing a holy or sinful character, and are therefore accounta-

ble for their actions. Moral law, as distinguished from the law of attraction, and every other law of the natural world, embraces all the duties which are imposed upon rational creatures, whether by revelation or the light of nature. In this large sense of moral law, those commands which are termed *positive*, like the interdict which was placed on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, are comprehended in the class of moral precepts. They are precepts which are given to moral agents, laying them under obligation of obedience to God. Though such a specific way of rendering obedience would not be obligatory, if not pointed out by a special precept, yet when pointed out, and thus made known to be the will of God, it is binding on the conscience. The precepts of the ceremonial law were obligatory until the coming of Christ; but under the Christian dispensation the obligation to regard them has ceased.

The epithet *moral*, when applied to law, is most commonly used to distinguish those precepts that require that which is in itself obligatory, from those precepts that require that which becomes a matter of obligation, merely because it is required. For an illustration of this distinction, I would say, that our first parents would have been under obligation to *love God*, without an express command requiring it; but their obligation to refrain from eating of a particular tree in the garden, arose wholly from the express command of God requiring them to refrain from it. Therefore the command to love God, in distinction from the command prohibiting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, belongs to that system of rules

which is, in the fullest sense, denominated *the moral law*. Those commandments which the Lord delivered to Israel, first by an audible voice from the burning mount, and then by writing them with his own finger on two tables of stone, are commonly called the *dec-alogue*, a name which intimates their number to be ten. The decalogue, in distinction from that system of ceremonial precepts which was given to that people, is termed *the moral law*; it being in as full force now as it was before the coming of Christ; in as full force in relation to the Gentiles as to the Jews. The law which the apostle had his eye upon in this chapter, was neither the ceremonial nor political law of the Israelites; but was evidently that law, a summary of which is contained in the ten commandments. Do you ask, how this can be determined? I answer,

First. In the context he quotes one of the precepts of the decalogue: "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet;" referring to the tenth commandment.

Secondly. The law which he had his eye upon was quick and powerful, one which discovered the thoughts and intents of the heart. He says, "I had not known sin but by the law:" again, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;" and again, "That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." The ceremonial law, except as based on the moral, could have had no such power to discover to him the plague of his heart. It is that law which requires what is in itself right, and forbids what is



in itself wrong, which gives to positive précepts all their strength. It was because Adam and Eve were under obligation to love their Maker, irrespective of an express command to do it, which made them feel guilty for disregarding the positive precept respecting the forbidden tree.

Thirdly. When the apostle wrote this letter to the church of Rome, all the laws which Jehovah had given to Israel, except the moral law, had lost their binding nature. Their civil laws were vacated by their being brought under the Roman yoke; and their ceremonial, by that change of dispensation which was consequent on the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In his letter to the church at Colosse, Paul himself speaks of the handwriting of ordinances as being blotted out and taken out of the way, by its being nailed to the cross.

I conclude that nothing further needs to be said to convince you, my brethren, that by law in the text is intended *the law of God*, that law of His which is designed to regulate the conduct of his intelligent creatures, and which he has mercifully made known to the sons of men in the Holy Scriptures; and that it more particularly intends that system of rules which, in distinction from the political and ceremonial systems, is denominated *the moral law*. This is undoubtedly the law which the apostle declares to be spiritual. This leads me to inquire,

II. What is meant by its being called *spiritual*? The same, I would say, which is meant in the twelfth verse by its being called *holy*. It is called spiritual,

to denote its agreement with the Holy Spirit, its agreement with the God of holiness. When Christ tells us that God is a Spirit, he appears to have intended something more than to inform us that he is an immaterial Being; for he adds, as an inference from what he had said, "And they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." This was as much as to say, that a Being who is not only spirit in his essence, but *spiritual* in his moral character, must be worshiped in a spiritual or holy manner. The renewed man is contrasted with the unrenewed, by being called *spiritual*, while the other is said to be carnal. When Christ says, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life," he cannot mean that his words are spirit in the same sense that God is a spirit; or in the same sense that he who is born of God is spiritual; for words are not voluntary actors. They are, however, an index of the views and feelings of such actors. Those words which not only indicate a right state of heart in those who utter them, but which are also adapted to produce right affections in those who receive them, are properly denominated spirit and life, when contrasted with words of a contrary character, whose tendency is to corrupt the hearers. In both these respects it is proper to speak of the law of God as spiritual: for, in the first place, it is a perfect index of his own heart. "There is none holy as the Lord." Nor is there any other law holy like His. And, in the second place, while it exhibits the holy character of the Lawgiver, it is adapted to promote holiness of character among the subjects of his government. If

it is in the best possible manner adapted to honor God, and promote the holiness and blessedness of the moral system, then it has a claim to be called a spiritual law. That it has such an adaptation there is not the least reason to doubt. To prepare your minds, my hearers, to form a proper conception of the spirituality of the law of God, you must be convinced,

1. That he has a perfect right to make a law. Any one may give advice ; but it is the prerogative of the high God, both to establish law himself, and to delegate a degree of the power of legislation to the governments of men. His power to establish law is not delegated, but original. In the most unlimited degree does He possess the capabilities which are needed for the administration of government ; and His right it is to reign, for the created universe is all his own. Intelligent creatures belong to God as much as any part of his works ; and since he has imparted to them a susceptibility of discriminating between good and evil, he has an undoubted right to establish moral government over them, and lay them under the obligations of law. They who concede to him the right to make such creatures, will hardly presume to question his right to rule over them after they are made. A universe of intelligent creatures, unrestrained by moral law, would present a more unlovely picture than a universe of matter left to move at random, without being regulated by attraction and the other laws of the natural world.

2. It is important we should know, that it is not merely because God has a right to reign, that he establishes a government over his intelligent creatures ;

his benevolent concern for them, if nothing else, would prompt him to do it. In the domestic circle, the good of the children, as well as the honor of the parent, calls for something more than advice; and the best good of the creation, as well as the honor of the Creator, requires that he should do something more than advise his creatures what to do. Yes, my hearers, the best good of such creatures as we are, requires that our duty should be placed before us in the form of *law*. Advice, as well as law, places duty before us; but it leaves us at our pleasure about doing it. Law consists of two parts: First, Of duty, made known by injunctions and prohibitions: Secondly, Of sanctions, consisting of rewards and penalties, to enforce the observance of the duty made known.

3. To understand the holy character of the law, it is necessary to know what it requires, and what it forbids: for it is not true concerning every thing which comes in the shape of law that it is holy. The Scriptures speak of a "throne of iniquity which frameth mischief by a law." Very different from this is the throne of God, and the law which he has framed. His law requires *holiness* and forbids *sin*. He comprises all the precepts of his law in this one: "Be ye holy; for I am holy;" and all its prohibitions in forbidding his creatures to sin. "These things," said an apostle, "write I unto you that ye sin not." Again the same apostle says, "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law; for sin is a transgression of the law."

4. To get a clearer view of the spirituality of the

law we need to form correct sentiments concerning the nature of holiness and of sin—also, to know how much of the one is required, and how much of the other is forbidden. As to the nature of holiness and sin, it is evident they are moral opposites; so that by understanding the nature of the one, we shall be helped to determine what must be the nature of the other. Let us seek to obtain,

(1.) A definite idea of the nature of holiness. The Scriptures make use of this word to describe that quality of an intelligent being which is morally right, which will prevent the upbraidings of his own enlightened conscience; which renders him worthy of the complacency of other intelligences; and which will incline him to be useful and not mischievous to his fellow-beings. Holiness is a moral quality of indescribable value, since it is the glory of intelligent beings; and without beings of this description, the rest of the universe (could we form a conception of its existence) would be a blank. And devoid of holiness of character, intelligent beings are more unlovely and noxious than the most deformed and poisonous among all the brutal tribes. The Scripture speaks of “the beauty of holiness;” and of all beauties this is by far the most attractive. This it is which constitutes “the beauty of the Lord,” which David desired to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life to behold. When any of our fallen race are recovered from the dominion of sin by sanctifying influence, “the beauty of the Lord our God is upon us.” Holiness is the same affection of heart, not only in all creatures, such as angels and

men ; but is the same in the Creator that it is in his creatures. When God says to his creatures, " Be ye holy ; for I am holy," he requires them to possess the same character which He himself possesses.

It is important it should be understood that the seat of holiness is the *heart*. An external act is not holy, except it be the result of a right frame of heart. Without this, the greatest mental endowments and the most splendid performances do not raise their possessor above a moral non-entity, and eventually they will profit him nothing. 1 Cor. 13: 1-3. It is the *pure in heart* on whom Christ pronounces the blessing.

If holiness has its seat in the heart, we need next to know, and that with precision, what that frame of heart is which the Scriptures denominate holiness. They speak of " true holiness;" implying that there is something that receives the name of holiness, which is not true and genuine. David asked the Lord to renew a *right* spirit within him. In regard to the affections of the soul there is a *right* and a *wrong*. The law of God requires that the affections of the soul should be right. What these right affections are, may be learned from those two brief commandments, on which, as the Savior declares, hang all the law and the prophets ; which is as much as to say, they contain the quintessence of the whole of God's word. The commandments are these : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment ; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." By examining this summary we shall be greatly as-

sisted in ascertaining the nature of true holiness, and the reason why the law which enjoins it is declared to be holy. In Christ's epitome of the law we find nothing local, nothing confining it to those who lived in Canaan, in distinction from those who lived in other parts of the earth: nor to the inhabitants of the earth, in distinction from other parts of the universe. It is noticeable that this epitome describes obedience to the law, merely as it exists in the heart, without stopping to tell us by what external actions it will be displayed. Indeed these must be somewhat varied in different conditions, and in different parts of the universe. In this abridgment of the law, the obedience of the heart is all comprehended in that affection which we call *love*. To this agree the words of the apostle, who says, when speaking of the duties of the second table, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

If we have found that love is the fulfilling of the law, our next inquiry should be, What is the nature of that love which fulfills the law? It is manifest that it is something which differs widely from loving one's self, and loving others in subordination to this selfish object. The object of love which is placed before us, according to the Savior's interpretation of the law, is the intellectual universe—God and his rational creatures: not excluding ourselves from the number. God, as infinitely the greatest and best Being, the Creator and Governor of the world, claims for himself the highest place in our affections: but he also claims a place for our fellow-creatures;



requiring that we should love them even as ourselves. I think it is clear, that an individual subject of divine government is not allowed to make more of himself and his own happiness, than he does of a world of fellow-creatures and their happiness. And does it, I would ask, allow him to make more of his own, than of the interest of any one fellow-creature who is every way his equal? What can be intended by this precept, Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others? If my fellow-creature possesses a better character than myself, I am required to esteem him even more than myself. See Rom. 12: 10. Phil. 2: 3, 4. There is a sense in which every man's interests, both for time and eternity, are placed by his Creator more directly under his own supervision than the interests of any other individual; yet the law of God does not allow him to attend to his own interests from motives of a selfish character. If it did, it would allow that which is at the foundation of all the discord in the universe.

To sum up in a word our descriptions of that holiness which the law of God enjoins on the subjects of moral government, I would say; It implies the exercise of the love of benevolence or good will towards the intelligent universe, and the exercise of the love of complacency or delight towards all such as possess a holy character, in whatever world they may exist. In order to the exercise of this love which is the fulfilling of the law, it is by no means necessary that we should be informed how many intelligent beings there are in the universe, to draw forth our benevolence, or

how many holy characters there are that deserve our complacence. If our hearts were in such a frame as to be ready to embrace all the objects which present their claims to our benevolence and complacency, it would constitute that inward obedience which the law requires. Were all the subjects of moral government to possess this pure affection, to the extent of the divine requirement, it would have the effect to prevent all collision of interests, and bind together the whole family of beings in the most perfect union. The love which has power to do this, may well be called "the bond of perfectness." Col. 3: 14.

I have said that the seat of holiness is the heart; I now say that true holiness will not remain pent up in the heart; it will most certainly flow out. "Make the tree good and its fruit good." As a good tree will bring forth good fruit, so a good heart will prompt to good actions. Paul assures us that love worketh no ill to his neighbor; and hence he infers that love is the fulfilling of the law. Herein appears the excellency of a holy heart, its tendency is to make a blameless life. Let the two brief commandments, which we have been considering, be written to perfection on the heart, the consequence would be that the ten commandments, of which they are an epitome, would to perfection appear in the life. We should serve no other God but the true God: We should neither make nor bow down to an image of any kind, even under pretence of thereby offering homage to the invisible God: We should never profane either the name or the day of the Lord: In the relation of children we should obey our

parents : As belonging to a race clothed with bodies of flesh, we should offer no violence to the person of our neighbor, nor abuse to his wife or daughters; nor should we attempt to rob him of his property or reputation. In fine, were the law of love perfectly written on men's hearts, they would not so much as covet any thing that is their neighbor's. Moreover, that law of love which would prevent our offering an injury of any kind to our neighbor, would also prevent our injuring ourselves. It would cause us to live *soberly* as well as righteously and godly. It would prevent intemperance, gambling, vain and corrupting amusements, all misspense of precious time, and every degrading practice whereby a man wrongs his own soul.

Having given you a brief description of the nature of holiness, both in its internal affections and external actions, I proceed,

(2.) To describe *sin*. It is the opposite of holiness. It is the opposite of that love, which, when felt and acted out, is the fulfilling of the law. But is sin all made up of hatred? has it no love in it? Yes, sin as well as holiness has love in it. But the ultimate object of regard in the two cases is very different. The one is disinterested, and the other is an interested and selfish love. Supreme love to one's self is no part of obedience, but is the very thing in which consists the transgression of the law. Though the law, in requiring every man to love his neighbor *as himself*, gives him a right to love himself as his neighbor; yet that love, which a selfish creature exercises towards himself, is very far from constituting

any part of obedience to the law of God. Sin sets up an object which it loves, but its object is infinitely less than the one which holiness seeks. They who come short of making the glory of God their chief end, make a chief end of their own glory. They who do not unite with a God of love, in seeking the good of the universe, fall infinitely below this object, and live only unto themselves. Creatures who are entirely selfish may love their fellow-creatures, and even their Creator, in subordination to their own happiness. They love such as they imagine love them, and assist them in the promotion of that selfish interest, which is always their ultimate end. When they consider their Maker as employing his great power to promote this darling object, they may feel the affection of love and gratitude towards Him.

As a holy heart prompts to holy actions, so a sinful heart leads to sinful actions. But between these two cases, there is a difference which we do well to mark. While a holy obedient heart would never produce an external transgression of the law of God, a totally depraved heart may produce external obedience. Had there been no such case as this, the Savior would not have charged the Pharisees with making clean the outside of the cup and platter, while the inside remained filthy. That sin can ape holiness, we know: for it is said concerning the greatest sinner in the moral system, that he transforms himself into an angel of light.

The next question is, How *much holiness* is required, and how *much sin* is forbidden by the divine law? Nothing I think can be plainer than this, that

the law requires a perfection of holiness, and consequently forbids all sin. There is nothing short of this which will come up to the demands of the law. The text asserts that the law is *spiritual*, without intimating that there is any thing in it of a contrary nature. Its spirituality appears, first, in its requiring true holiness; and, next, in its requiring a perfect degree of it. When the infinite God commands his creatures to be holy, even as He himself is holy, we know that he does not require an infinitude of holiness; but he does require a perfection of it, according to that New Testament injunction, "Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." The heart is required to be full of holy love, both to God and men. The command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind," requires that all the natural powers of the soul should be under the influence of holy love. Such perfection of obedience is required, not only at one time, but at all times and under all circumstances. We are required to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; and not only to begin to do well, but to *continue* in well doing. The law requires that the glory of God should be made our ultimate end, not only in our religious services, but in the most common actions of life: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." There are none of God's intelligent family whose holiness of character has exceeded his requirements; and yet there are some whose character has been uniformly *blameless*, in the highest sense of the word. For an example of this look at the holy angels. Holiness,

unmixed with sin, has characterized them from the day wherein they were created. And that unmixed holiness, which has been exemplified in them, God has required of all his rational creatures ; and such holiness he now requires.

If perfect holiness is required, the inference is plain, that all sin is forbidden. But this is not learned merely by inference ; for the law is very explicit in its prohibitions, as well as in its requirements. It prohibits all sin,—in its root, and in all its ramifications. Concerning the evil of sin it is always uttering this cry, “ Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate ! ” — “ Abhor that which is evil ” — “ Abstain from all appearance of evil. ” The law disallows all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ; all intemperance and lasciviousness ; all covetousness, whether connected with dishonest or honest gains ; all profane and obscene talk, and even every idle word. It forbids sin in thought, as well as in its external acts. Christ taught us that the seventh commandment could be transgressed by a mere thought of the heart. Solomon says, “ The thoughts of the wicked are abomination to the Lord. ” David says in prayer to God, “ I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love ; ” plainly implying that he considered every vain thought which was originated in his heart, as being a transgression of God’s law.

As a further means of acquainting ourselves with the holiness of God’s law, let us spend a moment in looking at the *sanctions* by which it is enforced. It is its sanctions, its penalties and rewards, which make a law to differ from mere advice. The penalty more

especially is that which gives force to any enactment. But punishment, threatened to the disobedient, necessarily implies a reward to the obedient. That loss of the favor of governmental protection, which is threatened to disobedience, clearly implies the continuance of this favor where no disobedience occurs. But the promissory part of the divine law is not only learned by inference; it is distinctly noticed by the apostle. He says, "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them." This imports, that entire obedience to the law would constitute a righteousness sufficient to secure the favor of the Divine Lawgiver. And this is a favor of no small magnitude.

But on the other hand, the least disobedience incurs the penalty of the law. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;"—not the soul that sinneth a certain number of times; but that sinneth at all. "It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Again it is written, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." By transgressing one of the commands of God, we deny that infinite authority which enjoins them all. His law is all of a piece. It may be compared to a cord extended between two points, which has power to sustain what you hang upon it, so long as it remains unbroken: but by means of a single break, it lets



every thing hanging upon it fall to the ground. And here let me say, the law is a cord of such a nature that it can never be mended by him who has once broken it. As it is impossible that he should re-live that part of his existence wherein he transgressed, he can never make himself an innocent creature, that is, innocent in the eye of the law.

Holiness is undoubtedly as lovely as sin is hateful; but it is not as meritorious as sin is ill-deserving. Thus matters are viewed by the governments of men. That subject, who under any of the governments of earth is entirely loyal, that is, obedient to the laws of his government, is considered as doing nothing more than his duty. Should he be guilty of but one act of treason, he forfeits his life. Thus the law of the Supreme King holds out the promise of His favor to all who obey him; and just so long as their obedience continues to be perfect: but the moment that rebellion against his government commences, his favor is withdrawn. And one thing which is included in the loss of God's favor, is a perpetual abandonment to sin, by the withdrawment of his Holy Spirit. According to the structure of the divine law, it is made certain that he, who begins to transgress, will go on to transgress without ever ceasing, unless mercy shall interpose, through an atonement, to recover him from apostacy.

Some may imagine that the law would appear holier, or at least more lovely, in case its penalties had been restricted to the present life, or to some limited period in the life to come. I grant that penalties, which transcend the demerit of transgression or the

necessities of government, detract from the excellency of a law. But there are crimes committed against human government, which call for as severe a penalty as it is in its power to inflict, even the death of the criminal. And should this punishment be commuted for that of imprisonment, we should not hesitate to say, the honor of the law and the good of the community would require that the imprisonment should be during life, even if that life were to be protracted to an antediluvian period. Let us remember, my hearers, that the Infinite Being, who made the law, is altogether more competent than we are to determine how great a penalty his law needs to give it the greatest possible energy and respect. And here I would ask, whether we ourselves are not able, from our own observation, to perceive the need of a penalty denouncing eternal death to the transgressor? Have we not some proof before our eyes, that a penalty less severe would be inadequate? We know that some of our fellow-men adopt the sentiment, that all the threatenings of the divine law are restricted to the present life; while there is another class who suppose that the threatenings extend beyond the present life, yet not to an endless duration. Now I have never known a man among those that have adopted either of these sentiments, who has been awed by the threatenings of the law, to such a degree as to prompt him to seek deliverance from its penalty by regenerating grace. I am serious in declaring it to be my belief, that there are none of those that embrace either of these senti-

ments, so long as they entertain no suspicions of their soundness, who ever make an earnest and persevering effort to become acquainted with experimental religion. Now, if this be a fact, (and if it be not a fact of universal application, I am persuaded there are but few exceptions to it,) does it not exhibit convincing proof, that God's law needs a penalty which threatens something more than a temporary punishment? Does not a penalty, denouncing eternal death to the transgressor, serve to show in what high estimation the law is held by the Law-giver himself? It shows that in his estimation it is worthy of infinite regard; and that its abrogation would be, not only dishonorable to Himself, but ruinous to the created universe.

I would now remark that this divine law, which we have been contemplating as one which requires true holiness, and a perfection of it; and which forbids all sin, even in thought; and whose penalty is death eternal, remains unrepealed and unabated; and so it will remain forever. The death of Christ in the capacity of a substitute for our apostate race, has given the most satisfactory proof that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, that he does not delight in giving pain to his creatures; since it has opened a way for the eternal redemption of those who fall in with the mediatorial system of salvation: but it has not annulled the penalty of the law, nor in the least degree lowered down its requirements. Among the disciples of Christ, every thing in their character which is below the perfect requirements of

the law, is still considered as sinful in the sight of God, and as that which calls for new exercises of repentance for sin, and faith in the Redeemer's righteousness.

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## LECTURE VII.

THE SUBJECT OF THE FOREGOING LECTURE CONTINUED.

For we know that the law is spiritual.—Rom. 7: 14.

THIS passage suggests these three inquiries: I. What is meant by *the law*? II. What by its being called *spiritual*? III. How is its spirituality *known*? Having answered the first two, I come to the

III. Inquiry, namely, How is the law *known* to be spiritual? “For we *know* that the law is spiritual.” The apostle speaks of the spirituality or holiness of the law as a thing of notoriety, a thing which was well known, or might be known by all. Indeed we should suppose that nothing more would be necessary than a careful inspection of its injunctions and prohibitions, its promises and threatenings, to convince us of the holiness of its nature. It enjoins every thing which is right, in the affections of the heart, and in the actions of the outward man. It prohibits every thing which is wrong, whether in external conduct, or the frame of the mind. Its promises are all made

to well doing, and its threats are pointed against nothing but what is evil in its nature and tendency. But besides that knowledge of its holy nature, which we obtain by looking at the law itself, there are other things which are well calculated to convince us that there can be no imperfection in it: Such as these:

1st. We may know that the law is holy, even to perfection, by knowing that God is the Author of it. A God of infinite knowledge and holiness cannot make a law which shall favor sin. It must favor holiness, and that alone. Whatever tolerations there may have been in the civil code which he gave to the nation of Israel, it is certain that as Moral Governor of the universe, his law could be nothing short of a transcript of his own perfect character; according to that injunction, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." If God is love, if he is benevolent, he must lay us under obligation to possess a loving and benevolent heart. His long-suffering patience can bear with much sin; but his law can admit of none.

2dly. Jesus Christ not only displayed the spirituality of the law in his teaching, but exemplified it in his sinless life. He said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." In his human nature he rendered such a perfect obedience to the law, that he was not afraid to challenge his enemies to convict him of a single sin. But perfect as was the life of the Son of God, it did not exceed the perfection of his Father's law. If then we know that the Savior's heart and life were perfect, we know that the law, which was written on his heart, and regulated his life, was also perfect.

3dly. We cannot but know that the law of God must be holy to perfection, seeing the object intended to be accomplished by its enactment, is nothing less than to produce a perfect uninterrupted harmony among intelligent beings. No system of rules is sufficient to produce and preserve such harmony, unless its perfection be absolute. A law which should tolerate the least defect of character would be incompetent. If that love which the law enjoins, as being the sum of obedience to all its precepts, were of a selfish character, it would have no tendency to produce a union among intelligent beings. Had the law tolerated the least degree of that love which makes one's self, instead of God, its centre, it would be insufficient to produce a perfect moral harmony. It must therefore be essential to that charity which is "the bond of perfectness," that she *seeketh not her own*.

The law is so constructed as to make God the centre of attraction to the moral system, around which all created intelligences are required to revolve. To every created intelligent it is commanded, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thou shalt love thy fellow-creature as thyself. From the intercessory prayer of Christ (John 17: 21-23) we clearly perceive that harmony in the moral system is an object of supreme delight to the Triune God. What can be more gratifying to his benevolent heart, than to see his rational offspring in perfect union with himself and with one another. Now it is the tendency of sin to disturb this union; even the least degree of it, in whatever shape it may appear, has

this tendency. The least degree of pride and selfishness is at war with the harmony of the moral system. Such affections, it is easy to see, would greatly diminish the concord and blessedness of the heavenly society. We may know then for certainty, that the least degree of pride and selfishness are repugnant to God's law; for the law must be as perfect in its nature as heaven itself; else the most entire subjection to it would not make a heaven of blessedness. And let us, who still inhabit the earth, remember, that the law requires of us the same perfection, the same entire freedom from moral evil, which it requires of the inhabitants of heaven. In the Lord's prayer, this is one of the petitions: "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven"—not only as really, but as perfectly.

4thly. We know that the law is spiritual from this circumstance, that no unregenerate man, however fair may be his exterior, is considered as yielding the least degree of subjection to it. "The carnal mind," said the apostle, "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." There are men in unregeneracy who are quite moral, and, as to external performances, there are some who are even religious; and yet from the passage before us we learn, that there is not one of them who is in any degree subject to the law of God. This proves the entire depravity of all unrenewed men; and, what is more to the point in hand, it clearly proves the perfect holiness of the law. If the law is such a holy thing that the unregenerate man never yields to it any obedience at all,



then the regenerate man does not fully obey it, so long as the least vestige of sin remains, so long as selfishness dictates one of his actions.

5thly. We know that the law is spiritual, that it is indeed a holy law, because the least defect of character precludes all hope of divine favor, except it be by grace, wholly by grace. The law itself affords no protection to him who has transgressed at all. If the penalty of the law is incurred by the least deviation from moral rectitude, it proves the law to be wholly on the side of that rectitude. It is evident that the law makes no provision for the relief of him who cannot say, with the strictest truth, "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." By adhering to this principle of his government, does not the Supreme Ruler very emphatically assert the unchanging perfection of the moral law?

6thly. The children of God know that the law is spiritual by the influence which it exerts in discovering to them their remaining depravity, and driving them from all dependence on the law for justification. In the context the apostle makes the demand, "Is the law sin?" He answers, "God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin but by the law." Now, if it is by the law that sin is detected and shown to be exceedingly sinful, that is, exceedingly vile, the law itself must be holy, exceedingly holy. The more deeply the law is engraven on the table of the Christian's heart, the more clearly does he discover his remaining sinfulness. Now he sees that God's law not only requires purity of heart, but perfect, uninterrupted purity. Though his life may now, in a sense, be

blameless, he has nevertheless a deeper conviction of sin, and groans under its bondage more than when he was, in the completest sense, the servant of sin. This led the man after God's own heart to say, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

There is no doubt that it was this discovery of the spirituality and extent of the law which led John Brown, of Haddington, a pious minister of the Church of Scotland, to say, "Though I have not been left to commit gross crimes, yet he (i. e. God) knows the outrageous wickedness of my heart, such wickedness as would have provoked any but a God of infinite love to cast me into hell." Samuel Rutherford, another Scottish divine, whose faithfulness in the cause of Christ had lodged him in a prison, after speaking of the soul-refreshing views he had of divine things, has these words: "But notwithstanding all, if my inside were seen, I would forfeit all love and respect from the lovers of Christ. His fair glory is but sullied and spoiled in coming through such a filthy and polluted creature as I am." Another and still more illustrious example of the influence of the law in discovering to a child of God his remaining depravity, we have in the case of Paul: for, whatever others may think of the remaining part of the verse from which our text is taken, I am persuaded that it was the deep and affecting sense which the apostle had of his imperfect sanctification—his short-comings, in view of the infinite purity and obligations of the law, which led him, after saying, "We know that the law is spiritual," to make the confession, "but I

am carnal, sold under sin." Though he was not carnal and the servant of sin, in the same sense that he was in his unregeneracy, he felt the bondage vastly more than he did then. There is perhaps nothing else which gives the subjects of grace such an impressive and abiding conviction of the spirituality of the law, as the influence it exerts to keep them acquainted with the plague of their own heart.

This is certain, that the more the work of sanctification progresses in the heart of the believer, the less he depends on the law for justification; and this constitutes an argument to establish the spirituality of the law. Why, it may be asked, does the believer depend less on the law the more holiness he possesses? An augmentation of holiness does at the same time increase a conviction of his own sinfulness, and of the spirituality and extent of the law. Thus through the law he becomes dead to the law, considered as a covenant of works. His prayer now is, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." The utter impossibility of obtaining justification by our own obedience, shows the law to be immutably perfect and uncompromising in its character. "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law."

### APPLICATION.

1. Let us make use of this subject to impress our minds with the solemn and interesting relation which it discovers to us, as existing between us and our

Creator, namely, the relation of *Ruler* and *subjects*. As moral agents, we are under the government of God ; and we are always under it, wherever we are, and whatever we are doing. We are under His government, whether we acknowledge it or not. " Every one of us shall give account of himself to God ;" for He is " the Judge of all the earth." He requires that we should give him the heart ; and He will know whether we do it or not ; for He searches all hearts. Human governments can take cognizance of no transgression of their laws, except it be some overt act ; but God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing. In some respects there is a near resemblance between us and the brutal tribes. We have, in common, the same corporeal senses. We grow and decay alike. But men, in distinction from brutes, are subjects of moral government. They are capable of knowing, loving, and obeying their Creator ; also, of hating him, and rebelling against his authority. They are capable of enjoying his smiles, and of feeling the weight of his wrath.

Remember, fellow probationers, though you may despise your birthright, your privilege of belonging to the family of intelligent beings, and may sell this privilege for a mess of pottage ; yet you can never exchange your place in the creation for that of the beasts that perish. If you refuse to submit to the authority of the Supreme King, you will nevertheless retain your place in the moral system ; but you will be degraded to the humiliating condition of criminals under his government. He will say of

you, "But those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." His subjects we must be, whether we consent or dissent. With which class of subjects shall we consort? with the rebellious or the loyal? Which is duty, which is the part of wisdom? Will any of us dispute the right of the King Eternal to reign over us—to reign over all? His law is holy, just, and good; and in keeping his commandments there is a great reward. Let us forthwith submit, if we have not already done it, to the claims of our rightful Sovereign.

2. This subject seems calculated to strip us of all excuse for remaining ignorant of God's law, or of its spiritual character. With such means as are within our reach, it is not difficult for us to know that we are placed under a Divine law, and that this law is worthy of our supreme regard. Had we nothing but the light of nature to instruct us, to assist our intellect and conscience to apprehend the will of our Maker, even in that case, disobedience to the moral law would be inexcusable: for the moral law is founded on the nature and fitness of things. But we, who from our childhood have known the Holy Scriptures, must be inexcusable indeed, if we are ignorant of the law of God. In the Holy Scriptures it is embodied in specific precepts and prohibitions, and in this form it is reduced to writing. The Ten Commandments constitute a summary of all moral obligation; and this summary is registered not only in the sacred volume, but also in our memories, where it was written in our early childhood. Cir-

cumstanced as we are, we cannot but know what the Lord our God requires of us. Nor can we help knowing that the things which he requires of us are most reasonable—such as he has a right to require, and such as we must feel ourselves under obligation to reduce to practice.

It is easy to see that the spirit of the Ten Commandments is contained in those two brief ones which the Savior gave us: one of which requires that we love the Lord our God with all the heart, and soul, and strength; and the other, that we love our neighbor as ourself. It is perfectly evident that these two commandments prohibit all selfishness, and require disinterested love. They forbid us to be sinful, and require us to be holy. A mere inspection of the law, as it is spread out before us in the Bible, is enough to convince us that it is a perfectly holy system. But when, in addition to this, we know that it is the law of the Holy One; that the sinless life of Christ was nothing more than an exemplification of its holiness; and that it was intended to lay the foundation of a perfect society state among intelligent beings; when these and such like things are known as evidences of the spirituality of the law, are we not entirely without excuse if we are still in darkness? If under all these advantages we still remain in darkness, it must be because we love darkness rather than light: and such a preference amounts to full proof that our deeds are evil.

3. In the light of this subject we may see how to account for the amazing insensibility of mankind, as to their need of the new birth, or of the benefit

of Christ's atonement: it is owing to their ignorance of the spirituality of God's law. Paul tells us why he was once alive, when he was in reality nothing but a sinner, dead in trespasses and sins. It was because he was then without the law, that is, without any proper conception of its spirituality. He says, "But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Before this coming of the commandment, he felt no need of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, nor of the Redeemer's righteousness. Even in this gospel land there are not a few who appear remarkably ignorant of the great purity and extent of God's law. They do not feel their need of a change of heart, though their heart is in no degree subject to the law of God. They speak of themselves as having a good heart, although they make no pretension to an acquaintance with the new birth. As things are seen by the omniscient God, every imagination of the thoughts of their heart is only evil continually. Could men in this condition once understand the infinite purity of that law, which is the standard whereby characters are to be tried, they would be ashamed to talk of their good heart. They would see that they had never possessed one affection of heart which was in accordance with the law, nor ever been governed by a motive which reached as high as the glory of the Divine Law-giver.

That ignorance of the holiness of the law, which keeps depraved creatures from seeing that they need a radical change of heart, keeps them also from seeing their need of a Savior's righteousness. While



they have never yielded the least degree of hearty and acceptable obedience to the law, they have such low and unworthy conceptions of this divine rule, as to fancy themselves to be just before God. With no better covering than a fig-leaf righteousness of their own fabrication, they flatter themselves that they shall be able to stand before their Judge in peace. They have heard of Christ; but they have never known him; they have never felt their need of him; therefore they are attempting to climb to heaven by some other way. Sinners, if you had your eyes opened to see the law as it is, you would perceive at once, that it is too holy to afford protection to the creature who has committed but one offence; how then can you think of such a thing as being saved by the law of works, when you cannot produce a single work which the law will not condemn? Could you become acquainted with the spirituality of the divine law, you would feel the force of that verse in the hymn:

“ In vain we ask God’s righteous law  
To justify us now ;  
For to convince and to condemn  
Is all the law can do.”

4. In view of the subject before us, it may be proper to inquire, whether it is not a misconception of the spirituality of the law, which has led some to imagine themselves to be sinlessly perfect. David did not think that he had attained to such perfection; for he said, “ Who can understand his errors? cleanse

thou me from secret faults." It would seem that Solomon did not think himself or any other man to be free from sinful imperfection; for he said, "There is not a just man upon earth, who doeth good, and sinneth not." This sentiment is corroborated by the apostle James, who says, "In many things we all offend." Paul did not view himself to be a sinless man when he wrote his epistle to the Philippians, for he said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." From the biographies of many later Christians, who have exhibited the most satisfactory evidence, both of the genuineness of their piety and of uncommon attainments in it, we learn that they were far from thinking themselves perfect, even in the most advanced period of their lives. This brings to my mind a death-bed interview, which I had with a Christian brother of more than ordinary attainments, who had been in the school of Christ for half a century. A day or two before his death, while I was conversing with him relative to the state of his mind, which by his account was more tranquil and joyful than he had anticipated it would be at such a solemn crisis; I put a question of this import to him, whether he thought he had now become perfectly holy? He promptly replied, "almost entirely the reverse of that."

But there is another class of Christians that give no more evidence of devotedness to the cause of Christ, and yet claim that they have attained to such perfection as to see nothing in themselves to condemn or repent of. How, we ask, can this vast dif-

ference between these two classes of Christians be accounted for? I answer, it may be accounted for by supposing that they entertain essentially different views of God's law. David said, "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad." Paul said, "The law is holy—we know that the law is spiritual." The views which David and Paul entertained concerning the extent and spirituality of God's law were such as to keep them from thinking themselves to be sinless characters. The same may doubtless be said of such men as Edwards, Brainerd, Brown and Scott, and a host of others of a like spirit. With the views which these men had of the holiness of the law, it was not possible they should think they had attained to a sinless state. And is there not reason to believe, that the other class would never have thought of it, had they entertained the same correct views of the extent and spirituality of the law?

It is not improbable that some have made a mistake in this matter, by supposing that an external obedience satisfies the demands of the law of God, as it does the demands of human laws. They suppose that if we restrain the wickedness of the heart, so as to prevent its flowing out into filthy streams, we do not transgress the law. A greater mistake than this can hardly be made. It is true that a temptation which is presented to us by another, for instance, by the devil, does not become our sin, provided we yield no compliance with it, either external or internal. But all those affections of the heart which are of a selfish nature, in whatever way they may be excited,

constitute a transgression of the law, though suppressed ever so soon. If this class of Christians grant the necessity of internal, as well as external obedience, to meet the demands of God's law, they may intend by it something essentially different from what is intended by their brethren. They may call those *holy* affections, which their brethren deplore as sinful. Perhaps they have considered all *religious* affections as right, without stopping to inquire what has excited them, whether it be the love of God, or the love of their own selves. *Happy*, joyful feelings of a religious nature, have often been considered as synonymous with *holy* feelings; just as if selfishness could not reach beyond the boundary which separates the world of sense from the world of spirits. That it is quite possible for men to imagine themselves, not only to be holy characters, but to be great proficient in holiness, who have never risen a hair's breadth above entire selfishness, is rendered perfectly certain by the case of the Pharisees. They were supremely selfish: yet "they trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."

The two classes of Christians, to which I have referred, may be led to entertain such different views of their own character, not only by their having different conceptions of God's law, but also by their having quite different conceptions of God himself. An idol, which is an unholy deity, can be served, even to perfection, without any holiness in the worshiper. And I ask whether it is not possible that we should worship an idol god—a creature formed by our own imagination—under the name *Jehovah*, or some other name or title of the true God?

5. It is in view of the spirituality of the law that we discover the glory of Christ. Our subject has led us to contemplate the Great Eternal as establishing a moral government, which extends to all intelligent creatures, and is to endure through everlasting ages. We have seen that the law, by which he proposes to rule the intellectual system, is every way perfect: that it is calculated to honor the Creator and bless all obedient creatures. The maintenance of Divine government is supremely important: and this government is based on an infinitely perfect law; which law has been disobeyed by the revolting angels and by the whole race of Adam. That the law cannot be revoked; nor be abated in the strictness of its requirements or the severity of its threatenings, without shaking the pillars of God's throne, and doing irretrievable injury to the moral system, must appear perfectly evident to every reflecting mind. It would be better that the material heavens and earth should pass away than that one jot or tittle should pass from the law. Matt. 5: 18.

This prepares the way for us to see the glory of Christ. It is an excellency in his character, that he had compassion on our fallen race. It is also an excellency in his character, that his compassion for us did not induce him to head a revolt against the government of God: or prompt him to ask for a repeal of the broken law, or an abatement of its strictness, or for a removal of its dreadful penalty. In his first public sermon he made a proclamation, which he intended should be sounded through this revolted province of Jehovah's empire: "Think

not that I am come to destroy the law—I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” Yet, in perfect harmony with this proclamation, he repeatedly declared that he came to seek and save that which was lost. To not destroy the law, and yet save from destruction the transgressors of it, was the very thing which brought him from heaven to earth. Herein is the glory of Christ displayed. He loved righteousness and hated wickedness. He loved the law and hated the transgression of it. Without such a character he would not be worthy to be called the Son of God. Nor would he be worthy of the respect and confidence of the children of men. But while he loved the law, and would have it on no consideration repealed, he felt a deep concern for those who had incurred its penalty. To combine these two objects, which had a seeming repugnance to each other, namely, the conferring of honor on the violated law, and saving those who had incurred its penalty, he allied himself to our nature, to put himself in a condition both to teach and obey the law, and then to give his innocent life a ransom for our guilty lives,—to suffer the just for the unjust to bring us unto God.

This infinite regard to such a holy law, in connection with a boundless compassion for guilty men, renders the character of the Redeemer very attractive. It endears him to all those whom he redeems from iniquity and purifies unto himself. As soon as the divine image is restored to their souls, they admire the Redeemer for the honor he did to the law which they now love ; and this admiration steadily increases

as the work of sanctification progresses. It is to the honor of Christ that he did not propose to his disciples some less perfect rule than his Father's law. He enjoined it on them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and to love their neighbors as themselves. Though conscious of their own imperfection, they admire the perfection of the rule and the perfection of Him, who not only prescribed it to them, but exemplified it by a life of unspotted holiness. This law-honoring, sin-condemning Savior is loved by all such as are washed from their sins in his blood. This is the Father's well beloved Son, and He whom all the angels of God admire and adore.

Lastly. In the light of this subject, we can see what will constitute the uninterrupted harmony of the heavenly society. It will be a complete and universal subjection to the perfect law of God. The Divine Trinity, in the persons of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, will display an infinite fullness of that love which is the substance of the law. The holy angels, who will compose a part of the heavenly society, have never transgressed this law during the whole period of their existence. Their capacious minds are completely under the influence of that love by which the law is fulfilled. As to the redeemed family of Christ, though the time was, when they were, every one of them, rebels against the government of God, and yielded no obedience at all to his holy law; yet now their disaffection to divine government is all removed, and the law of love is so indelibly written in their hearts as never to be again obliterated. Every individual in the hea-



venly society will not only possess true holiness, such as the law requires, but an absolute perfection of it. They will all love God; and they will love him with all their heart, and understanding, and strength. In this perfect manner they will love at all times, without any abatement or interruption. Each member of that holy society will love his neighbor—his fellow-creature—as himself. The inhabitants of heaven will prize their own happiness according to its real value, (and its value will not appear to them to be small;) yet there will not be the least particle of selfishness in the love which they exercise towards themselves. All those affections, so natural to us in this life, which exalt our own interest above its proper place, will be purged from every heart. Even now every degree of selfishness is condemned by the law of God, and in heaven there will be no transgression of this law. The citizens of the New Jerusalem will be unfeignedly thankful for their perfection in the holiness and blessedness of the upper world; but none will be proud either of their character or their elevation. None will envy such as are more honored than they, nor will any despise those who occupy a lower place than themselves.

On earth we should deem that to be a happy state of society, where no breaches of human laws, but more especially of divine laws, were to occur; where no man was known to injure his neighbor in his person, property, or reputation. But in heaven the social state will be rendered complete, by a perfect internal, as well as external obedience to the holy law of God. The internal obedience will be as en-

tire as the external; for there will be no hypocrisy in heaven. The warfare between the flesh and the spirit will be ended, by the complete victory of the spirit over the flesh. Even pride, that ever busy sin, which now seems as natural to us as our breath, will never more inflate the mind. In that world of light, no one will think of himself above that which he ought to think. For there the spirits of just men will be made perfect, in the completest sense. What a holy, amiable, and happy society that must be, where that law, which is a transcript of God's own benevolent heart, is obeyed to perfection, not only in all the outward actions, but in all the inward tempers and dispositions of the heart: where their worship of God is animated and sincere, and their treatment of each other perfectly kind, and the whole of this kindness the fruit of that love which is without dissimulation!

Will not all the redeemed family in heaven rejoice and give thanks, that God did not yield to their clamors against his law, when they were in their unreconciled and unregenerate condition? Will they not also give thanks, that He did not lower down the requisitions of His law, to accommodate their imperfect sanctification, while they were in their Christian pilgrimage? They will now have the fullest conviction, that the least abatement in the strictness of the law would not only have dishonored the Divine Lawgiver, but would have been a great injury to the subjects of his government. They can see that it was altogether better and more consistent, that, during their Christian pilgrimage, they should

have had occasion to watch and pray against, and mourn over those hidden evils of the heart, which are condemned by a perfect law, than to have had that law made any less perfect, for the sake of saving them from such a severe conflict, and from so many affecting confessions of their short-comings in duty.

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## LECTURE VIII.

PAUL'S EAGER DESIRE TO REACH THE MARK OF PERFECTION, ACCOMPANIED WITH AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT HE HAD NOT REACHED IT.

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3 : 11-14.

IN the first part of this chapter Paul warns the saints at Philippi to beware of dogs, to beware of evil workers, to beware of the concision. " For we," said he, " are the circumcision" (that is the true circumcision) " which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

To put them on their guard against these corrupters of Christian doctrine, he gives them an account of himself. He first tells them what he was before his conversion to Christianity, when he trusted in the righteousness of the law for acceptance with God. He makes them acquainted with this interesting fact, that his views concerning that righteousness, whereby men are justified in the sight of God, had undergone an entire change; that he had learned, what he once did not know, that sinful men could never be justified by a righteousness wrought out by themselves; but only by virtue of that righteousness which was wrought out by the incarnate God, the crucified Redeemer. To be found in him, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, was now all his dependence for eternal life.

These were Paul's experimental views in relation to the subject of a justifying righteousness. Here we have an important particular in the apostle's religion; but it is not the whole of it. Had he stopped here, his zeal to expose pharisaic self-righteousness might have left an impression on the minds of those who should read his epistle, that he favored an antinomian latitudinarianism. It behooved him therefore, when he had undertaken to place before them his religious exercises, as an inspired example, to acquaint them with his views of the subject of sanctification; that they might know what he did to promote personal holiness. They would naturally wish to know, whether his entire dependence on the righteousness of the Redeemer, rendered him indifferent about the righteousness of his own character. This

part of his experimental religion is the subject matter of our text. He had just entered upon it in the preceding verse, when he said, "That I might know him and the power of his resurrection." And this led him to say, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead;" which is the introductory part of our text, and which if rightly understood, will render the whole of it intelligible.

To me it appears evident, that by attaining to the resurrection of the dead, the apostle meant the same as attaining to a state of perfection in holiness. It is certainly doing no violence to the passage, to understand it thus; for there is a *spiritual* as well as natural resurrection. While we yet remain in the body we can undergo a change, which the Scripture terms "passing from *death* to *life*." John 3: 14. When our depraved nature is represented by a living principle (called "the old man,") which needs to be destroyed, the new birth is considered as a crucifixion; and so long as a breath of life remains in the old man, the sanctification of the soul is incomplete. But when *death*, instead of life or a living principle, is the figure which is chosen to represent our unregenerate character, then the new birth is described by a transition from death to life; or which is the same, by a resurrection. Although regeneration raises the soul from death to life, yet the life does not become perfect so long as the least vestige of death remains in the soul. Just so long as any spiritual death remains, the spiritual resurrection, its counterpart, is incomplete. Mortifying the old man, and imparting higher degrees of life to the new, are both expressive of the

same thing, namely, the diminution of sin and the augmentation of holiness in the soul of the Christian. In the same proportion that we are in the likeness of Christ's death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection. His death and his resurrection are both of them scriptural illustrations of our transformation from sin to holiness. "Knowing this," said the apostle in his epistle to the Romans, "that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed." He had just before said, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be in the likeness of his resurrection." In his epistle to the Ephesians, he alludes to the power displayed in the resurrection of Christ, for the purpose of illustrating that by which believers have been raised from moral death: "That ye may know——what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." Rom. 6: 5, 6. Eph. 1: 19, 20.

These quotations from two of Paul's epistles will help us understand the meaning of the verse which immediately precedes, and has an intimate connection with the text: "That I might know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death." To know the power of Christ's resurrection, and to be made conformable to his death, both amount to the same thing: for to experience a spiritual resurrection, answerable to Christ's resurrection from the tomb; and a spiritual crucifixion, conformable to his

death on the cross, both of them imply deliverance from the reigning power of sin. I now repeat what I have already advanced, namely, that we ought to understand the apostle's desire to attain to the resurrection of the dead, to mean the same as a desire to attain to a state of perfection in holiness; which is nothing less than a complete spiritual resurrection, or a complete deliverance from the death of sin. To make it evident that it was not a literal, but a spiritual resurrection, which the apostle intended, I wish to suggest the following considerations:

First. The literal resurrection—the rising of the body from the grave—comes to us without being sought, and is wholly unaffected by any agency of our own. But the resurrection which Paul had his eye upon, as the object of desire and pursuit, he sought to attain, even while he was here on earth.

Secondly. His saying, "If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead," appears to convey the same idea that he subsequently expresses in language which clearly shows that the object of desire and pursuit was higher attainments in piety: such as his *following after*—his seeking to apprehend *that for which he was apprehended of Christ*—his *forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth to those which were before*—his *pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. Does not this language evidently imply that he had already attained a degree of that resurrection which he sought, and that he was continually seeking greater degrees of it?

Thirdly. If the apostle had had in view the resur-



rection of the body from a grave of earth, instead of the resurrection of the soul from a grave of sin, it would have been needless for him to inform his brethren that he had not already attained to it. They knew of course, that if he had not yet died, he had not yet been raised from the dead. But if by *resurrection*, he intended a complete deliverance from the death of sin, it was very proper he should let them know, that though he had earnestly, and for a great length of years, sought to reach this point, he had not yet attained to it. "Not as though I had already attained."

Fourthly. The apostle himself explains what he meant; for as soon as he had said, "Not as though I had already attained," that is, to the resurrection of the dead, he adds this exegetical clause:—"either were already *perfect*;"—which tells what he meant by not having already attained to the resurrection of the dead. He evidently meant that his spiritual death was not wholly removed, and that the life of holiness had not yet reached its perfect state.

I know there are some who understand, that by the apostle's confessing he was not already perfect, he intended no more than to say he had not yet finished his Christian race, and reached the world of glory. They think this passage to be parallel with one in the 13th chapter of Luke, where Christ said to some who told him that Herod would kill him, "Go ye and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be *perfected*. Nevertheless I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be

that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." But the scope of this passage makes it evident that, when Christ spoke of his being perfected the third day, he referred to that journey which would be the last he should take; for the third day would bring him to that wicked city where the Lord's prophets were wont to lose their lives. "For it cannot be," said he, "that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem," that is, any where else except at Jerusalem. This declaration of Christ gave information to those whom he addressed concerning facts which they could not otherwise have known, namely, the time and place of his death. But surely the saints at Philippi needed not that Paul should tell them that he had not already finished his pilgrimage and gone to heaven: or that the general resurrection was not past already. As the scope of the passage just quoted from Luke's Gospel, makes it evident that by his being perfected, Christ meant the same as finishing his journey to Jerusalem, or his journey through life; so the scope of the passage now before us shows that Paul meant something else by being perfect. He is manifestly speaking of his ardent desires and vigorous efforts for personal holiness. As soon as he had said that he was not already perfect, he goes on to tell what he did in order to attain to this perfection. He says, "But I follow after, if I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." He then again confesses that he had not reached this point: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." After repeatedly acknowledging his imperfection, he again brings into view the bright side

of his religious experiences: "But this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark." His reaching forth to the things before, and pressing toward the mark, clearly indicate his eagerness to progress in holy attainments, and his determination to rest in nothing short of perfection. This appears to have been that resurrection of the dead which he sought to attain; and which, not having attained, rendered him an imperfect man. I think it is a clear point, that the mark which he aimed at, and toward which he pressed, was sinless perfection, or an entire deliverance from sin.\*

If the text has been rightly explained, it suggests such sentiments as these:

I. That the state to which Christ designs ultimately to bring his redeemed people, is that of sinless perfection.

II. During the present life they do not arrive at such a state.

III. Yet even here, perfection is what they seek; it is the mark toward which they press.

\* If by *the resurrection of the dead*, to which the apostle made such sedulous efforts to attain, we understand the resurrection of the saints at the last day, still it cannot be the act of rising from the grave that is intended, but rather the moral perfection which was known to be inseparably connected with that state. In view of the perfect holiness of the resurrection state, he might be said to be reaching forward and pressing toward it, while he still remained an inhabitant of the earth.

I. The state to which Christ designs ultimately to bring his redeemed ones is that of *sinless perfection*. In the words before us the apostle says, "I follow after, if I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Christ Jesus, in a most gracious manner, apprehended Paul when he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against his disciples, and subdued his rebellious heart. The change which he then produced in his character, he designed should be not only preserved, but ultimately perfected: so that instead of being a rebel, he should become as perfectly loyal as if he had never possessed any other character than that of loyalty. And what Christ designed to do for Paul, he designs to do for all the rest of that glorious company who were given him of the Father. He finds them all in a state of entire depravity, from which he intends to raise them, by sanctifying grace, to a state of perfect holiness. If it be asked what reason we have to believe this, I answer:

1. It is evident that deliverance from sin is made a material part of their salvation. He saves his people from their sins. The other part of their salvation is deliverance from natural evil, by which is meant suffering. Now since it is certain that he designs at length to deliver his people from all natural evil, it is rational to believe that he will also deliver them from all moral evil. When there is no more curse, we may expect there will be no more sin.

2. The advancement which the saints make in holiness during the present life, naturally leads us to look forward to a state of perfection. The right-

eous not only holds on his way, but waxes stronger and stronger. The path of the just, like the shining light, grows brighter and brighter. Now we expect that every thing in the vegetable and animal creation which progresses, will ultimately arrive at perfection. The growing harvests at length become fully ripe, and growing animals reach their full stature. Since then we know that those who are born of God are growing in grace, may we not thence conclude with great certainty, that they will ultimately reach a state of moral perfection?

3. There is abundant proof from the Scriptures that the sacrifice of Christ, which is sufficient to cleanse from all sin, will be so applied to the redeemed as to produce this effect. The blood of Jesus Christ is said to cleanse from all sin, and from all unrighteousness. The apostle has this testimony concerning Christ: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from *all iniquity*." "Thou shalt call his name JESUS," said the angel to Joseph, "for he shall save his people from their sins." The name *Jesus*, thus interpreted, gives his people assurance that their salvation from sin shall eventually be complete. His salvation is a perfect one. The spirits of just men will be made perfect. This will prepare them to sing that New Jerusalem doxology, Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. I proceed to show,

II. That during the present life the redeemed do not arrive at sinless perfection. "Not as though I had already attained," said Paul, "either were already perfect.—Brethren, I count not myself to have

apprehended.”—That is, “I make no pretension to have reached that moral perfection which Christ requires of me, and to which I am confident he designs ultimately to raise me. No, I am still an imperfect saint.” But how, it may be asked, does this prove that others of the redeemed family do not arrive at sinless perfection in the present life? How does Paul’s imperfection afford proof that all other saints are imperfect, any more than David’s adultery proves that all other saints are adulterers; or than Peter’s denying his Master, proves that all other Christians have done the same? To this it may be replied,

1. That though there are traits of character peculiar to some men, there is a moral *nature* which is common to all. Every unrenewed man is not a drunkard or a profane swearer; but every unrenewed man is an enemy to the Holy One of Israel, and lives to himself instead of living to God. Among the subjects of grace, some are manifestly more exemplary than others. That which is an easily besetting sin to one may not be so to another. There are some who take such heed to their ways as rarely to sin with their tongue, while others have occasion often to mourn over some unadvised expression or foolish word which has escaped from their lips. But where the external conduct of one is more blameless than that of another, the hidden evils of the heart are more alike. Selfishness, pride and covetousness are evils of which they all complain. As to external transgressions, the Christian does not conclude that his brethren all resemble him. If he has a thirst for strong drink, which has in some instances proved a

snare to his soul, he does not thence infer that all his brethren are as much exposed to this sin as himself. But when he perceives in himself a propensity to be lifted up with pride; or a disposition to depend on the righteousness of the law, he cries out, Pride is the Christian's besetting sin—"Self-righteousness is the bane of the Christian"—of every Christian! While he can hardly think that the hearts of his brethren are as prone to be puffed up with pride as his own, still he would be shocked to hear any one of them, even the very best, say, that he had no longer any trouble with a proud heart.

2. The imperfection of Paul, if that is proved, furnishes a strong argument to establish the doctrine of the universal imperfection of the saints on earth. It does so in two ways.

1st. Paul was a saint of the first magnitude. When guided by the Spirit of God, he makes this declaration: "In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." Though in him sin first abounded, yet did grace superabound. After his conversion he was as much distinguished by his attachment to the cause of Christ, as he was before by his opposition to it. As it was once said, in relation to the power of worldly acquisitions to make us happy, "What can the man do that cometh after the king?" so may we now say in relation to high attainments in sanctification, What can the man do that cometh after the great apostle of the Gentiles? If, at such an advanced period of his Christian life, as that when he wrote his epistle to the Philippians, (for it was written after he was sent as a prisoner to



Rome,) he had not already attained to perfection, we may safely conclude that he never attained to it while he lived. And if *he* never attained to it while he lived, we have no reason to believe that any other saint ever attained to it. We may therefore understand that passage, Eccl. 7, 20, in its fullest latitude: "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not."

2d. What was wrought in the heart of Paul by the Spirit of God, and by His direction laid before the churches in the inspired epistles, was designed as an example of a genuine Christian experience. In this inspired epistle he discloses the feelings of his own heart as a paradigm or sample experience; that others might know what are those exercises of heart which constitute "truth in the inward parts." Was he not prompted by the Holy Spirit to narrate his religious experiences, to enable all the readers of his epistles to know with certainty what are the feelings of a true Christian? Many have related their religious experiences, and they have been made a pattern for the imitation of others, while as yet it had not been ascertained that such experiences were in accordance with the truth of God. All can see that it was therefore a matter of supreme importance, that we should have the religion of the heart placed before us, not in theory only, but also in *experience*. Now, since we have the same certainty that the religion of Paul was genuine, as we have that the Bible is the word of God, we need not be afraid to try *our* religion by *his*. The disclosures which he makes of the hidden evils of his heart, as well as of those holy

affections wrought there by the Spirit of God, will help us to judge of the character of our religious affections. If I can perceive that the feelings of *my* heart agree with the feelings of *his* heart, I may know that I am a child of God.

In the outset I had occasion to show what we ought to understand by the apostle's confession, that he had not attained, nor become perfect, nor apprehended that for which Christ had apprehended him. If this was a confession that he was yet sinfully imperfect, (and I do not see what else it can mean,) it proves not only that Paul himself was imperfect, but is in reality good proof that all other believers are so.

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## LECTURE IX.

THE SUBJECT OF THE PRECEDING LECTURE CONTINUED.

HAVING shown, first, that sinless perfection is that state to which Christ designs ultimately to bring his redeemed people; and secondly, that in the present life they never arrive at such a perfect state; I proceed to show,

III. That even here, while they are on earth, perfection is what the saints desire, and is the mark towards which they press. They not only desire to be perfect when they shall arrive in heaven: they desire it now while they are on earth. This is most cer-

tainly true, if Paul's experience is designed for an example, to show us what are the experiences of other saints. "If by any means," said this holy man, "I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." As soon as he had confessed that he had not attained, he adds, "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." After again confessing his short-comings, he says, "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark." If this does not express a desire—an eager desire—for perfection, I do not know what language could express it. It seems to have been a desire which prompted him to make continual effort to obtain the object on which he set his heart.

If *Paul* desired and sought after perfection, all others who are partakers of the heavenly calling will do so; for they are all by one Spirit baptized into one body, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Cor. 12: 13. It is true that the children of God are not all of equal stature. Nehemiah bears testimony to the distinguished piety of Hananiah, by saying that "he feared God above many." Our apostle was one who was pre-eminent in his spiritual attainments; but it was not peculiar to him to desire greater degrees of sanctification, or even to desire a perfection of it. This is a trait of Christian character in which all true converts agree. As it is common to them all to be conscious of their sinful defects, so they agree in deploring those defects, and in seeking a deliverance from them all. That a desire for

perfect sanctification belongs of necessity to a renovated character, must appear evident by such considerations as these :

First. As God himself is perfect in holiness, he requires his creatures to be so. "Be ye holy, for I am holy," is the requisition of his word.—"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." The law of God enjoins perfect holiness ; and it is the nature of grace to make us love this law. "O how love I thy law !" "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right." Holiness is the very thing which endears the character of God to all his children. They love him because there is no unrighteousness in him. And since they love *him* for being perfect, they cannot but desire to imitate his perfection. They desire to be furnished with a *moral*, as well as natural ability, to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and soul, and strength.

Secondly. They who are passed from death unto life love the brethren ; that is, they take complacency in those who are recovered from sin to holiness. They do not love them for their defects of character—for what remains of the fruits of the flesh ; but wholly on account of the fruits of the Spirit which appear in them. Now if it be holiness of character which draws forth their complacency, they may say with sincerity, what Paul said to the saints at Corinth, "This also we wish, even your perfection." And if they wish the perfection of their Christian brethren, they cannot fail to wish for their own.

Thirdly. That the child of God desires to be freed from every vestige of sin, is proved by that disap-

probation he feels toward all the sin which he sees; and that repentance he exercises in view of all which he commits. We hear one of God's children exclaiming, in view of the corruptions which he saw around him, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they kept not thy word:" and another, in view of the corruption he saw in his own heart, "Behold, I am vile—I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Now can any one truly abhor all the sin which he sees in himself and others, and yet not desire to be entirely delivered from the thing which he so mortally hates?

Fourthly. The spiritual warfare, if it be any thing more than a mock fight, proves that the Christian seeks the destruction, the utter destruction of all his spiritual foes. An important part of this warfare is internal, and consists in the spirit's lusting against the flesh. The spirit, or the renovated portion of the heart, is the same as that *grace* which reigns through righteousness, and which seeks to destroy all the corruptions of the heart, and to reign without a rival, in what (according to the dialect of Bunyan) is called the town of Man-soul.

Fifthly. The prayers of the saints, as they are found in the sacred volume, evince their sincere desire not only for ultimate, but present perfection. They are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Every good man, under the influence of the Spirit of grace and supplications, will pray, with David, "Order my steps in thy word, and let not *any iniquity* have dominion over me." "Incline not my heart *to any evil thing.*"

The followers of Christ, not only pray against the commission of every sin; but they watch as well as pray. And such praying and watching against sin, betoken a sincere desire for its complete eradication from their hearts.

Sixthly. They who have been at all recovered from the dominion of sin, are pleased with heaven when considered as a place of spotless holiness. It is such a heaven they desire in preference to the paradise of Mahomet, or any other place defiled with sin. That perfection of character which is secured to the heavenly state, renders it very attractive to the children of God, even while they remain upon earth. It has created a longing desire in the hearts of many of them to leave this world of sin for that world where sin has no entrance. Paul desired, as soon as he could be spared from the church on earth, to depart and be with Christ in a holy heaven. And all God's children would doubtless have similar desires, had they an equal assurance of their adoption into his family. If a desire for a heaven of perfect holiness is unfeigned, it proves that an entire freedom from sin is the object which they now seek, and that nothing short of such perfection will ever content them.

It is objected to what has now been said concerning the Christian's desiring and seeking perfection, that this cannot be an object of pursuit by those who have no expectation of attaining it. In reply to this objection, I would say;

(1.) As the racer seeks the goal, or the mark toward which he runs, from the first to the last step of

the race, though he knows that the last is the only one which will actually reach it, so may the convert seek perfection through the whole of his Christian course. It is in allusion to a race that the apostle says in our text, "I press toward the mark." In the very outset, he fixed his eye on the end of the race, eagerly anticipating that perfection in holiness, which would fit him for the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of his beloved Savior.

(2.) There is a sense in which the Christian, in distinction from the man in a race, seeks to reach the goal at every step he takes. If by the goal, be intended the terminating point in the race, he does not seek to reach it until he takes the last step. But if a perfection of character be what is intended by it, (and this seems to be what the apostle intends by the mark toward which he pressed,) he seeks to reach it by the first, and by all the succeeding steps in the race. In the literal race, there is an impossibility of a natural kind, to prevent one from reaching the goal, as soon as he starts from the barrier. But in the Christian race it is otherwise. There is no insuperable difficulty, to hinder the Christian racer from reaching the mark of perfection at his very outset; except what consists in the depravity of his own heart. If the impediment, which hinders the Christian from reaching the mark of perfection, were of such a nature as to place it beyond the control of a willing mind, it would then be unattainable, in such a sense as to preclude all effort. But now the man of grace seeks to reach the mark of perfection at every step which he takes. When he attempts to



promote contrition in his heart, it is a perfection of this grace which he seeks. So when he would strengthen his faith in God—in Christ—it is a faith unmixed with doubt, which he seeks to obtain. It is so in relation to the other graces of the Spirit and parts of the Christian character.

But why, it may be asked, if the redeemed of the Lord desire and seek to be perfect while they are here on earth, do they not actually attain to it? To this inquiry, I have no answer to give by way of excuse: but I have an answer to give, which accounts for the fact, that Christians do not become perfect as soon as they desire to be so. We have a pertinent answer to this inquiry, from the pen of the apostle, Gal. 5: 17: "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary, the one to the other; *so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" The spirit, or the sanctified nature, desires perfect holiness; but the flesh, the unsanctified nature, has desires which are entirely of a contrary character. And these, so long as they remain, effectually prevent the other class of desires from being fully gratified. The language of the Christian is, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

The subject to which we have now been attending is far from being a mere speculation, it is highly practical.

1. It serves to expose the religion of two classes

of professed Christians—those who claim to have arrived at sinless perfection—and those who make no effort to arrive at such a state.

First. It exposes the religion of those *who profess to have arrived at sinless perfection*. I make no pretension to an intuitive knowledge of the hearts of my fellow-men. But God possesses such a knowledge; therefore, every criterion of moral character which comes from him may be relied on. If (for example) the Searcher of hearts has declared, “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now,” we ought to conclude that a cherished hatred of our brethren is decisive proof of our unregeneracy. Although every man has the power of looking directly into his heart, and discovering the quality of his inward affections, nothing is more common than for men to mistake their character. The apostle intimates, that a man may think himself to be something, when he is nothing, and thus deceive himself. And the wisest of men assures us, “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.”

The volume of inspiration is adapted to recover us from the ruins of the fall, to improve our renovated character, also to help us determine what our character is, whether we are for Christ or against him. One way which God has taken to promote these important objects, is by placing before us attractive examples. He has set forth his well beloved Son as our supreme example of holy living. Next to his Son, I am led to believe, he has constituted Paul,

the apostle of the Gentiles, our chief pattern. By his Spirit he guided this servant of his to say to us, in one of his epistles to the Corinthians, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." And in our context, as soon as he had narrated those religious experiences which we have been considering, he says, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them that walk so, as ye have us for an example." There is an important particular wherein Paul is our pattern, in distinction from Christ. It is to the honor of Christ that he could not himself give us an example of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit—nature and grace. As Christ was never a sinner, his conflict with sin was not like that with which every Christian is much acquainted, namely, a conflict with the corruptions of his own heart. But Paul was originally a sinner, as entirely depraved as any other man. The grace of God made a sudden and wonderful change in his character. Yet the change, though great, did not complete his sanctification at once. He still needed much discipline. He needed thorns in the flesh to prevent him from being exalted above measure. In common with his brethren, he had foes without and *foes within*, to conflict with during his mortal life. In this respect, Paul is our pattern so as Christ himself is not. It was exceedingly important that the Spirit of inspiration should present us with a distinguished example, in the Christian church, of a genuine convert, who should give us a history, not only of the acts of his life, but also of the affections and conflicts of his mind. And the apostle of the Gentiles, rather than

any other individual, seems to have been selected for this purpose.

If it should be said, that neither Paul's external nor internal defects were designed as a pattern for our imitation, I grant it: for he required his brethren to be followers of him only as he was of Christ. Yet it is true that he, with all his imperfections, is a pattern for us in this respect; that in him we learn what a Christian *is*. In Christ we see, to perfection, what a Christian *ought* to be; but in the apostle we learn what a Christian actually is. It was so ordered in providence, that Paul's epistle to the Romans and his epistle to the Philippians should not be written, until after he had been many years in the school of Christ, and his religion had had opportunity to become matured: for it is in these epistles he gives us the fullest account of his religious experiences, and of his severe conflict with indwelling sin; accompanied with an explicit acknowledgment of his not having reached a state of perfection in holiness. His conflict with indwelling sin and his conviction of falling short of perfection, are not trifling circumstances; they manifestly constitute a material part of his religious experiences. We therefore have a right to say, that whoever shall now claim to have a religious experience which essentially differs from that of the apostle—an experience which has never had, or which does not continue to have connected with it, such a conflict with sin, and such a humbling sense of falling short of the demands of a perfect law,—has reason to fear that he has made a mis-

take, either concerning the nature of holiness, or the character of his own exercises and actions.

In this connection, suffer me to place before you a specimen of the experimental religion of President Edwards; than whom we have probably not had in the American church a greater divine, or a Christian more deeply experienced in the religion of the heart. At a period of his life when his religion was much matured, he remarks: "It is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, of the depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit left in my heart. I have a much greater sense of my universal exceeding dependence on God's grace and strength of late, than I used formerly to have; and have experienced more of an abhorrence of my own righteousness. And yet I am greatly afflicted with a proud self-righteous spirit; much more sensibly than I used to be formerly. I see that serpent rising and putting forth its head continually, every where, all around me."

When such experimental exercises as these are placed by the side of Paul's experiences, as they are disclosed in the text, I would ask, have we not more reason to believe that Edwards was a true convert—a real Christian, than we should have had, if he had described himself as unconscious of remaining depravity, and as having no longer any conflict with the corruptions of his own heart? And, with the apostle's experimental religion before us, can we not perceive the propriety of an observation which was made by Brainerd during the last year of his life? "I could

not but think," said he, "as I have often remarked to others, that much more of religion consists in deep humility, brokenness of heart, and an abasing sense of barrenness and want of grace and holiness, than most who are called Christians imagine."

Secondly. The subject before us exposes the religion of those *who make no effort to become perfect*. The religion of such differs from that of Paul in a very important particular. He not only kept on his way to heaven with a steady pace, but strove to mend his pace, and to do the will of God to perfection. The deep conviction he had of remaining imperfection, and his groaning under it as under a body of death, shows us that he would fain have been as sinless as an angel. This is also shown by those fervent breathings after perfect holiness, and those efforts to attain to it, which occupy a prominent place in our text. His language is, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead"—that is, a complete deliverance from moral death. As soon as he has informed us that he has not yet attained, he repeats the mention of his desire and effort to attain to it: "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." No sooner has he informed us that he did not count himself to have apprehended, than he tells us again how greatly he desires it: "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark."

We now see that part of the apostle's religious experience which is comprised in the spirit's lusting

against the flesh. Nor was this lusting of the spirit against the flesh so weak and ineffectual as to accomplish nothing. It is true that, while he remained in the body, it did not enable him to reach the mark of perfection ; but we see it kept him constantly pressing towards it.

Is it not unreasonable, my brethren, that we should any of us have recourse to that part of the apostle's experience which exhibits the lustings of the flesh against the spirit, for the purpose of proving that our experiences are genuine, if in the other part, namely, the lusting of the spirit against the flesh, there is no resemblance between his religion and ours ? Our religious experiences may be genuine, though our attainments do not equal those of the apostle, and though our breathings after holiness are less ardent than his, but we have no right to conclude they are genuine, unless we resemble him in following after—in seeking to apprehend that for which we were apprehended—in forgetting what is behind and reaching forth to that which is before—unless we resemble him in pressing toward the mark of perfection. They who are born of the Spirit have all entered the Christian race, and they must continue to run, or they will not obtain the prize. They have engaged in a holy war, and none will be conquerors but those who fight during the war. Nor will it answer for us to fight as those who beat the air. Our bodies must be kept under and be brought into subjection, else we shall be castaways.

If, my hearers, we should oppose the doctrine of the Perfectionists, because we have no desire to be



perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect, it would be a strong indication that we had not been baptized with the Holy Ghost. God forbid that I should say a word to hinder growth in grace or progress in holiness. Holiness constitutes the beauty and excellency of moral agents. It is the beauty of the Divine Mind. And it should be our daily prayer that this beauty of the Lord our God may be upon us. The more we possess of it, the more lovely, happy and useful we shall be. When we find our breathing after holiness of heart and life is faint, it is an alarming symptom. It betokens our spiritual health to be poor. Those professing Christians who settle down with the acquirements they have already made; who are not reaching forth to those things which are before; who are not cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; who are not holding on their way, and even waxing stronger and stronger; have no right to take encouragement from Paul's acknowledgment that he was not already perfect. For never did a miser appear more eager to acquire greater sums of gold, than he did to acquire greater degrees of conformity to his glorious Redeemer.

According to the sentiments which most of us have adopted, we should be apt to suspect the genuineness of *his* religion who appeared to have no sympathy with the apostle in those humbling confessions he made of his imperfect sanctification. And have we not as much reason to be suspicious of *his* religion, who appears to know nothing of those hun-

gerings and thirstings after righteousness, which occupy such a distinguished place in the religion of the apostle? Surely he who has no other sign of grace, except a consciousness that he is not a sinless character, can have no great reason to comfort himself. A conviction that we have not attained to perfection, when not accompanied with desires and efforts to attain to it, can constitute no evidence of a gracious state. In this connection does it not behoove us, Christian brethren, to inquire, whether the profound sleep which has come over the churches of our land be not, to a great extent, the sleep of death? Have we not occasion to fear, that the reason why the churches at the present day shed forth so feeble a light on the surrounding darkness, is that the lamps of quite a portion of the members, for want of oil in the vessel, are gone out? Many professors of this description are doubtless calculating that ere long they shall arise and trim their lamps, and that then they will burn and shine. But is it not to be feared that they belong to that class of virgins, who will sleep on until the Bridegroom shall come, when it will be too late to supply themselves with oil for their lamps?

To all who have paid a careful attention to the subject before us, I think it must appear evident, that no religious experiences, however bright they may have been, can lay any solid foundation for the Christian hope, unless they have come along down with us to the present time. Neither our convictions of sin, nor our aspirations after holiness, can have been left behind, if indeed we are partakers of the heavenly calling, if we are the temples of the Holy

Ghost. The water which Christ gives to those who ask it of him, proves in every case to be a living well, springing up into everlasting life. And where this living water springs up in the soul, it will disclose itself in the external conduct; for it is agreeable to its very nature, to flow out in fertilizing streams. [Compare John 4: 14, with 7: 38, 39.] ✓

Do our religious experiences, my brethren, agree with those of the apostle, which have this day been placed before us? It is a very interesting inquiry, and one which ought not to be disposed of without deep consideration. If we are certain that we have the same kind of religion which he had, and which he describes in the text, and in other parts of his writings, then may we know that *his* Savior is *our* Savior, and *his* heaven will also be *ours*. If we press toward the same mark to which he pressed, and with similar desires to reach it, then shall we obtain with him the prize of the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus. But if our religion is entirely of another kind; if it extinguishes convictions of sin, and produces that satiety which destroys a hunger and thirst after righteousness; if it makes us wish to get to heaven with as little religion as will possibly answer; then as certainly as Paul's religion is genuine, ours is spurious, and must be given up, and something better obtained in its room; else, when the Bridegroom shall come, we shall not be admitted into the marriage with the prepared guests. And when the door is shut, we shall be excluded: after which, knocking will be utterly unavailing.

2. While this subject shows that sin is possessed

by the regenerate as well as the unregenerate, it furnishes no security for the latter ; for, though there is a point of resemblance between these two classes of men, there is nevertheless a wide difference. The saint on earth does not agree with the saint in heaven, in being perfectly cleansed from the filthiness of sin, but is, in common with the unregenerate man, possessed of a sinful nature : and yet the latter does not agree with him, in partaking of a holy nature. In this respect they entirely differ. It is true that the saint as well as the sinner has been totally depraved ; but he is now partially cleansed, while the sinner remains in all the filthiness of his original depravity. The soul of the renewed man is composed of two entirely different natures, termed *flesh* and *spirit* ; while the soul of the unrenewed man is nothing but flesh. The renewed man mourns over that period of his life, when he was estranged from God ; also over those relics of original depravity, which still cleave to him : but the unrenewed man, being a stranger to godly sorrow for sin, holds fast deceit, and refuses to return. The heaven-born soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and seeks to mortify its sinful propensities : but the unrenewed mind seeks its happiness in the gratification of such propensities. The spiritual man prays much for the Spirit of God to help him eradicate from his heart all the roots of native depravity : but the carnal man always resists the Holy Ghost, lest he should be converted and turned from those selfish pursuits, on which is all his dependence for happiness. The spiritual man, having repaired to the standard of recon-

ciliation, earnestly desires that every proud imagination of his heart, and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ: but the carnal man, still adhering to the standard of rebellion, cherishes all the native pride of his heart. He who is under the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, is progressing in holiness and fitness for heaven: but he who is destitute of the Spirit, is progressing in wickedness and fitness for destruction. The saint has renounced, and is still renouncing the merit of his own doings: but the merit of his own doings is all the sinner's dependence: he has never submitted to the righteousness of God. The saint, by virtue of his union with Christ, has received the forgiveness of his sins, and stands justified before God: but the sinner, having no union with Christ, is in a state of condemnation.

Let not the sinner then imagine, because the saint, as well as himself, has sin about him and within him, that there is but a slight difference between them. There is a difference of character which is fundamental; and the distance between them is widening every day. And nothing short of a radical change, on the part of the sinner, will prevent their being placed as wide apart, in the coming world, as heaven and hell.

## LECTURE X.

HOLINESS OF CHARACTER, BOTH INTERNAL AND  
EXTERNAL, SECURED BY THE NEW BIRTH.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 1 JOHN 3 : 9.

To derive profit from this, or any other portion of Scripture, it is necessary to apprehend its true meaning. It is by knowing the truth that we are made free—free from mistake, and its pernicious consequences. If we would make ourselves acquainted with the text, we must first ascertain the definite meaning of the assertion, which is made concerning the man who is born of God, that he “ doth not commit sin :” and secondly, we need to understand what that is, which is declared to be sufficient to preserve him from its commission.

1. Let us seek to ascertain what is asserted concerning the man who is born of God, when it is said, he *doth not commit sin*. It is worthy of notice, that the thing which the apostle asserts, whatever it is, he extends to all the subjects of the new birth, without any exception.

It is manifest that he does not describe a few privileged converts, but all such as have passed from death to life. *Whosoever* is born of God doth not commit sin. To this he adds, “ And he cannot sin,

because he is born of God." Whatever the apostle intended by one's not committing sin, or by his being rendered incapable of committing it, he evidently applies to all the true subjects of this moral change. If they cannot sin, because they are born of God, then all who are born of God, are, in the sense of the text, secured against the commission of sin.

Now this circumstance renders it perfectly certain that the thing which the text declares concerning the man who is born of God, is not, that he has become immaculate and impeccable, or that he is, in the highest sense, a sinless character. If this were the meaning of the text, it would authorize us to assert, that no man since the foundation of the world, ever did a sinful action, or exercised a wrong affection of heart, after he had experienced the new birth. It would authorize us to say, either that Moses was not a saint, or that he never spake unadvisedly with his lips: that David was not a man after God's own heart, or that his adultery and murder were no crimes: that Peter was not a true disciple, or that his denial of his Master was innocent. It would authorize us to alter the reading of such a passage as Eccl. 7: 20; so that instead of its making the assertion, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not," it should affirm, There is not a just man who does good at all, unless he does good to perfection.

That good men in past generations, especially during the Old Testament dispensation, and the personal ministry of Christ, were not wholly sanctified, is so very evident as to be disputed by none. Even



that sect which are by way of eminence called "Perfectionists," do not, I believe, pretend that regeneration, in that period of the church, was followed by a perfect sanctification. They would explain our text (if I am not misinformed concerning their sentiments) so as to make it true in a *prospective*, though not in a retrospective application. But neither the text nor context gives the least intimation that what is affirmed concerning the man who is born of God, was intended to apply to such conversions as were then future, in distinction from such as were past. It is because they are born of God, and because their seed remaineth in them, that they cannot sin. And since it is equally true of converts in every period and place, that they are born of God, and that their seed remaineth in them, therefore the reason which is assigned why one of them cannot sin, will apply with all its force to their whole company. If then it is conceded by all, that the Scriptures do not teach that every true convert has always been sinlessly perfect, even from the time of his drawing the first breath of spiritual life, we must of course be agreed in understanding the assertion in the text to mean something less than an absolute freedom from sin.

Since we must all be convinced that it could not have been the intention of the apostle to assert, that regeneration and perfect sanctification are now and always have been simultaneous, we are compelled to look for some other construction of his words. And what construction can be more natural than the one which supposes he intended to say, "That whosoever is born of God will certainly break off from his sins.

If he has a *new heart* he will have a *new life*—not a sinful, but a holy life. We need not, we cannot understand him to say, that the man who is born of God is henceforth a sinless character, like the inhabitants of heaven; but rather, that the life which he henceforth lives will be free from sin, in distinction from the life which he before lived, and in distinction from the one which unconverted men still live.

Let us now examine the text in connection with the context. There is no better way than this to determine what a writer intends by the words and phrases which he uses. In the 13th verse of the last chapter we learn what was a very special design of this whole epistle: "These things," says the apostle, "have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." To enable believers to know that they had eternal life, he mentions some of the most essential points of difference between them and unbelievers. And there is no one thing to which he gives more prominence than the difference in their *external conduct* or manner of life. In the first chapter, this difference between the two moral classes is represented by their walking either in darkness or light: which I think can mean nothing else than their living, the one class a sinful, and the other a holy life.

In the second chapter, this point of difference between the two classes is more distinctly noticed. "Hereby," says the apostle, "we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But

whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." In these verses an external obedience to the divine commands is considered as the grand evidence of that love to God which is the obedience of the heart. Experimental religion, or love dwelling in the heart, is here made the tree, whose fruit will necessarily be an outward obedience to all the will of God. The closing verse of this chapter is in harmony with the verses which I have already quoted: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that *doeth righteousness* is born of him."

Let us now look into the chapter where the text is found, and examine the scripture whose connection with it is more immediate. The apostle begins this chapter by speaking of the astonishing love which God had shown to those whom he had brought into the endearing relation of sons. Concerning such he says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." This was telling the sons of God what a perfect conformity they would have to Christ, their Head, in the world to come. Having done this, he next informs them how they would be distinguished from other men, while they still remained on the earth. He says, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." That is, provided his hope be genuine, arising from the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, he will even now, in the

purity of his life, resemble his Savior. A little before the apostle reaches the text, he makes this emphatic declaration: "Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." He then adds, "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." Here he makes the doing of righteousness to be the exact moral opposite of that sinning of which he had just spoken. In the verse which stands immediately before the text he asserts, "He that committeth sin is of the devil;" and, in the one which stands next after it, he says, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God."

The line of separation which the text, with its context, draws between those two grand divisions of our race here denominated *the children of God*, and *the children of the devil*, is that visible difference which appears in their external walk. The difference intended is not secret, but one which is *manifest*. "In this," says the apostle, "the children of God are *manifest*, and the children of the devil." That is, they are manifest by their doing righteousness, and not doing righteousness—their sinning, and not sinning. No intimation is given in the text, or any where in this chapter, that the apostle is marking out a line to divide between a certain portion of the children of God and their less favored brethren; but a line to divide between the children of God and the children of the wicked one, and between the whole of the two families. According to the statements which he makes, "He that committeth sin is of the

devil:" yea, "whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." *Sinning*, according to the dialect which he uses, is full proof that one has had no experimental knowledge of religion.

But since no sober expounder of Scripture will pretend that every sinful defect of heart or life is decisive proof that we have never known the Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no consistent way of interpreting the apostle's assertion, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," but by understanding him hereby to describe that *reformed life*, which is the invariable fruit of a *renewed mind*. It amounts to an emphatic declaration, that a man's heart is no better than his life; that a man who does not live a religious life, is not a religious man; that he who does not walk as Christ walked, has not his Spirit; and if he has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Some may wonder, if this was all which the apostle meant by a man's not committing sin, that he should have made use of such strong language. But why, I would ask, should it not seem equally strange that all the names by which the Scriptures distinguish the men of grace from their fellow-men, should be such as are descriptive of *moral excellence alone*? None of these names imply any defect in their character. They are denominated the *saints*, the *righteous*, the *godly*, &c. By their being thus denominated, it is not implied that they are immaculate saints, or that they are righteous and godly to perfection. Yet, when we would distinguish them from their fellow men, it is proper to say of them,

they are saints and not sinners, righteous and not wicked, godly and not ungodly. Just so it is proper to say of them, they live holy and not sinful lives; that they live righteously and not wickedly. Were one man to say of another, I believe that this man is a real *saint* and not a *sinner*, it would not amount to a declaration that he believed the man's spirit was as free from every stain as the spirits of just men made perfect. Nor does the apostle's assertion in the text imply that every one who is born of God, is, in the highest sense, a spotless character.

There are some who suppose that the declaration in the text, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," means no more than to say, his renovated nature cannot sin. Had this been the idea to be communicated, the expression would have been, *whatsoever* is born of God doth not commit sin. In the room of its being said, *he* cannot sin, because he is born of God, the expression would have been, *it* cannot sin. The language of the text evidently indicates it to be a *person* that doth not commit sin; and that this person is held back from its commission by something which has been wrought within him by the power of God. Besides, to say the renovated nature cannot sin, would be rather an unmeaning declaration, since it is evident that the holiness of this renovated nature does at times suffer a sensible diminution. And to say that so much of the new nature, as shall at any time remain in the heart, does not sin, is merely to say, that so far as we are sanctified we are not unsanctified, so far as we are holy we are not sinful.

There are others who suppose that the thing which the apostle intended to assert in our text, is the impossibility that any of the regenerated should be left to commit the sin of blaspheming against the Holy Ghost. It is unquestionably true that all those who are born of God will be preserved from the commission of this sin. In the last chapter of this epistle there is a passage, much like the text, which stands in close connection with some instructions relating to that sin which is unto death. It would not therefore be unnatural to give to that passage such an application. But the context forbids us to expound the text in this way: for such an exposition would make the great dividing line between the regenerate and the unregenerate to consist in their being either guiltless or guilty in relation to this specific transgression. It would suppose (what I conclude none will pretend to believe) that this constitutes the plainest and most visible difference between these two classes of men.

Some think, when it is said concerning the subjects of the new birth that they do not sin, it means no more than that they do not sin *wilfully*, as other men sin. But if men professing to have passed from death unto life were to be as negligent of duty, and as loose in their practice as they were before their professed transition from one of these states to the other, how could it be known that they did not sin as wilfully as heretofore?

Others may think the text is designed merely to inform us of the safety of the regenerate,—to tell us that iniquity will not be their ruin. Its more imme-



diate design, however, is to tell us that they will not *practise sin* ; that, as a contrast to their former lives, and to the lives of such as still continue in sin, they will be holy men, not fashioning themselves according to the former lusts in their ignorance.

I trust we have now ascertained the import of that assertion which the apostle makes concerning such as are born of God. We must, I think, be convinced that while it does not teach a doctrine so contrary to Scripture and experience, as the sinless perfection of all the regenerate, it does teach that regeneration always produces a desirable and permanent change in our moral conduct.

In the outset I divided the doctrine of my text into two heads. In handling the first, which I have now finished, it was difficult to avoid anticipating some things which more appropriately belonged to the other. But its importance to a full understanding of the subject, requires that the

II. Head should now receive a more distinct consideration ; the object of which is to inquire, how we shall account for the fact, that a new and spiritual birth should produce such a reformed life. The reason which the text first assigns, why the man who is born of God doth not commit sin, is that his seed remaineth in him. It then proceeds to say, "and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Now the reason which is last given, namely, that he is born of God, would not have been sufficient to account for the fact that he cannot sin, had it stood alone. A spiritual birth does not of itself secure a

spiritual life. Adam was created in the image of God; but this did not prevent his apostacy. The devils we know were once holy angels. Had there not been a more established connection between the commencement and perpetuity of holiness, in the heart of a redeemed sinner, than there was between the imparting and preserving of a holy character, in the case of probationers under the covenant of works, then the new birth would give no security for a subsequent life of obedience. But the two cases are quite different. Though the holiness of innocent Adam and that of regenerated Adam (if regenerated he was) were of the same nature, yet as to the security given for their continuance, there was a great disparity. He who is born of God is born into a kingdom of *grace*, where, through the mediation of God's well-beloved Son, provision is made for the preservation, growth, and final perfection of the renovated nature.

To understand this part of our subject, we need to look attentively at these two things: first, the connection which is established between *regeneration* and *progressive sanctification*; and, secondly, between *inward* and *outward obedience*, or a sanctified heart and a holy life.

First. We need to be convinced that there is an established connection between *regeneration* and *sanctification*. That the moral change which is produced in the regenerated man is not transient, but permanent, is clearly taught when it is said, "*for his seed remaineth in him.*" They who pass from the death of sin to the life of holiness, receive an abiding

principle of life. They are raised from death, to die no more. They are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. They have an unction of the Holy One which abideth in them. They have the truth, by an experimental knowledge of it, in their inward parts, and it shall be in them forever. 2 John, ver. 2. They have drunk of that water which creates in them a living well, and which it is promised shall spring up into everlasting life. It is true their well is sometimes low, and would become entirely exhausted, were it not replenished from an exhaustless fountain. But that Almighty Agent, who produces this moral change, stands engaged to preserve, and also to improve it. Hence Paul could tell the saints at Philippi that he was confident of this very thing, that he who had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. The Head of the church has life in himself; and to all his spiritual members he says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." They are kept by the power of God, not merely as *men*, but as *believers*. 1 Pet. 1: 5.

The promises of the new covenant render it certain, that where holiness is introduced, by regenerating grace, into the hearts of any of the children of men, it will not only remain, but *increase*. Hence this change is compared to a child's birth, which is followed by his growth up to the stature of a man: and again, to the first dawn of light in the morning, which shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect

day. The righteous shall not only hold on his way, but go from strength to strength.

Secondly. As there is an established connection between incipient and progressive holiness in the heart of the convert, the connection is no less certain between *internal* and *external* holiness—between a *good heart* and a *good life*. The members of the body always obey the mandates of the mind. Though the mind, influenced by sensual appetites, may be induced to issue very unwise mandates, its regency is nevertheless retained to the very last. The Savior declared, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” And it is the heart which commands the hand and the foot, as well as the tongue. Were it not for this established connection between the man within, and the man without, external actions would be no index of character. If there might be a benevolent heart, and at the same time a slanderous tongue and a murderous hand, I can see no way in which we could distinguish between the good and the bad man. It is true that a bad heart may sometimes conceal its mischievous designs by a fair exterior, so as to resemble the cup and platter whose outside is cleansed: but a good heart will never influence to a bad life. Let the inside of the cup and platter be first cleansed, and the outside of them will be clean also. Matt. 23: 26.

Nothing can be more evident than this, that the doctrine of the text supposes the existence of an immutable connection between internal and external holiness. It supposes that if a bad tree can be changed into one which is good, its fruit will undergo

the same change. "For the tree is known by its fruit." The reason why any tree (either in the natural or moral world,) brings forth good, in distinction from bad fruit, is, that the tree itself is good. This is that which makes it natural for it to bring forth such fruit. Whosoever is born of God brings forth the fruits of righteousness, because he is a tree of righteousness, of the Lord's planting. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things." If then there is a promise which secures the goodness of every tree which is of the Lord's planting, it is a guaranty for its fruitfulness, even to old age. If it is made certain that the good treasure in the Christian's heart will never fail, it must be equally certain that from this unexhausted treasure he will continue to bring forth good things. If his heart remains good, his life will be good also. Matt. 12: 33-35. Isa. 61: 3. Ps. 92: 14. Having now placed before you what I believe to be the doctrine taught in the text, I shall close with a

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

1. In the light of this subject it is plain, that where one's experimental religion ceases, and does not go with him down through the different periods and changes of life, there can be no evidence that he has been truly born of God: for had he been born of God, his seed would have remained in him. The *seed* in him, is his experimental or inward religion; his repentance for sin—his faith in Christ—his supreme

love to God—complacency in good men, and compassion for those who are wicked—the spirit of devotion—hungering and thirsting after righteousness—holy meditation, and joy in the Holy Ghost. These and such like things, constitute the religion of the heart: and without the religion of the heart we are assuredly hypocrites.

On supposition that our religious feelings do remain, it nevertheless behooves us carefully to examine their nature; but if they have all, like smoke, vanished away, it is decisive proof against us. It is a dangerous opinion, which seems to be entertained by some, that a Christian's inward experiences, such as deep sorrow for sin, and holy joy in God, are chiefly confined to the day of his espousals, the time of his being born into the kingdom. This, it is true, is the beginning of his experimental knowledge of divine things, but it is not the end of it. Nor is it by any means the highest pitch of that knowledge. How comparatively ignorant and inexperienced is the young convert. How little does he at first know either of God or himself, in comparison to what he knows afterwards! As he grows in grace, sin appears increasingly loathsome, and holiness more attractive. He has more enlarged desires to be filled with love to God and love to men, and to have his enjoyment of the light of God's countenance uninterrupted.

Let us, who profess to be subjects of regeneration, ask ourselves, as under the eye of the great Omniscient, whether the incorruptible seed has remained within us. Has it been deepening its root in our hearts? Has our experimental religion come along

down with us thus far in life? Have those religious affections, which we considered as evidential of a transformation of character, remained with us until now? Are our thoughts much upon God? Do we cherish the spirit of prayer; and if at any time it subsides, do we feel unhappy till it is regained? Let us be entreated, brethren, not to indulge a hope that we are Christians, unless we can perceive the seed of the word remaining in us; unless we can perceive that there is a work of divine grace kept up, and even advancing in our souls. If we have not something in our experience that tallies with the description which Christ gave of his living and springing water, what ought we to conclude? We must not conclude that in describing that water he mistook its qualities, but rather that we have made a mistake and drank something else in its room.

2. With this subject before us, we can see, that so far as there is a deficiency in our *practical* religion, there is less evidence of the existence of that which is experimental. Just so far as the *life* is wrong, there is want of evidence that the *heart* is right. Concerning the genuine convert the apostle asserts, "His seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." This was as much as to tell us, that the abiding of the inward principle of holiness would regulate the external conduct. There are some, whose external religion is nearly all laid aside, who nevertheless seem confident that their *inward* religion remains. But surely, if they had the salt in themselves, they would be savory in their speech and behavior. If they had the internal light



in their hearts, their light would shine before men. If the water of life were springing up within them, it would flow out in works of piety and benevolence. The Savior who taught us that the water of life would continue to spring up in the heart of him who drank it, taught also, that it would flow out in fertilizing streams; for he said, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

A false conversion is no doubt sometimes followed by inward experiences. But as these experiences are of the same nature as the conversion, they do not ensure a life of external obedience, like those which flow from a genuine work of the Spirit. They, being based on selfishness, form no principle on which dependence can be made, that the man who is the subject of them will have respect unto all God's commandments. But true experimental religion is God's law written on the table of the heart. Such religion is holiness in affections, while the religion of the life is holiness in actions. He who has holy affections will have holy actions: he who has a pure heart will have clean hands. Therefore, he whose hands are not clean, has reason to conclude that his heart is not pure.

Brethren, let us examine ourselves in relation to this matter. Do we evince our acquaintance with the religion of the heart by the religion of the life? Do we live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world? As it would be foolish for us to imagine ourselves to be subjects of the new birth, had we never discovered any change in our internal man,

in our feelings towards God and things divine ; so it will be preposterous for us to think we are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, if it has led to no change in our external conduct, if we still live according to the course of this evil world. While the outside may be much better than the inside, it will never be worse. Therefore let none of us pretend to a good heart, so long as we have a bad life.

3. With this subject before us we may see of what importance it is that we compare one part of the sacred volume with another, and one part of the system of truth with the other parts ; else we shall destroy the harmony of the system, and set inspiration contending with itself. Were we to catch at mere sounds, without looking at the scope or connection of a passage, the words of our text might lead us to adopt this monstrous sentiment : *That every regenerate man is at once both sinless and incapable of sinning ; that no subject of this change ever commits a single sin, external or internal, but is as free from moral pollution as the spirits of just men in glory.* Now that such a sentiment would be contrary to Scripture and fact, will be acknowledged by all, not excepting the greatest errorists in the world. Yet the words, when taken in an isolated state, without comparing them with the context or Scripture in general, might very naturally lead to such a sentiment.

Were we to suffer ourselves to handle the word of God in this deceitful manner, we might seem to prove that the blind man, spoken of in the 9th chapter of John, and his parents too, were an exception from the general depravity of our race ; because Jesus said,

“Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents.” Take this deceitful method of disconnecting a passage from its context, and you might prove, that in the day of judgment God will approbate every human being, let his character be good or bad: for Paul declares, in the 4th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, “And then shall *every man* have praise of God.” But because we have it in our power, by disconnecting a passage from the scripture which surrounds it, to make it speak a language in contrariety to the connected system of inspired truth, it does not follow that it is right or safe to do so. God expects us to read his word with as much candor as we read any other book; not to see what curious schemes of doctrine we can build upon detached passages; but rather for the purpose of making ourselves acquainted with that pure and harmonious system which is supported by the concurrent testimony of all its parts.

4. This subject may afford some aid in meeting the plausible arguments of those who say that *sinless perfection*, which is a matter of universal obligation, and in a sense attainable by all, is *actually attained* by a certain part of the disciples of Christ. In the text it is declared, “*Whosoever* is born of God doth not commit sin,—and he cannot sin.” Where will they find another passage which seems more like upholding their peculiar sentiments than this? And yet, if this proves any thing for them, it proves too much: for they do not go so far as to believe that every one, who has experienced the renewing of the Holy Ghost, is a sinless character. As soon as they

have explained our text, so as to make it accord with their views of perfection, they have put it in our power to take from them all their armor wherein they trusted. Do they plead in favor of their sentiment, that some of the saints are said to be *perfect*? we may answer, they are all thus denominated. David uses the epithets *perfect* and *upright* as being synonymous; and Paul speaks of every *spiritual* man as being a *perfect* man. See Ps. 37: 37. 1 Cor. 2: 6, 15.

Some will say, If language so descriptive of entire purity does not mean entire purity, how can it be known that sinless perfection is ever to be enjoyed by the children of God, even in heaven itself? To this it may be replied, that it is not very difficult to determine when words expressive of moral purity are to be understood in their perfect, and when in their imperfect sense. When such words are applied to *God*, we know they must be understood in their fullest latitude. So also when they are applied to his *commands*, whether those commands are given to creatures perfectly or imperfectly holy, or even to those who have no holiness at all. Therefore when the Savior says, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," the perfection required must be that which has no mixture of sin with it. Also when perfection describes the mark at which the Christian aims, the word must be understood in the sinless sense; for nothing less than such perfection will satisfy the longing soul of him who is born from above. Phil. 3: 11-14. But when any words expressive of moral purity are employed to describe the character which

the saints on earth possess, or the attainments in holiness which they have actually made, the whole tenor of Scripture obliges us to understand them in a restricted sense.

Let us read God's word with a child-like simplicity, comparing one part of it with another, and there is very little danger of our running into any fundamental error. But where that child-like simplicity is wanting, the danger is great that we shall imbibe some fatal heresy, which, when carried out into its legitimate results, will subvert the whole system of gospel truth. It behooves us, in the character of Bible readers, to be clothed with humility; praying with the Psalmist, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.—Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

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## LECTURE XI.

A CLAIM TO SINLESS PERFECTION A SIGN OF AN UN-  
REGENERATE STATE.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."—1 JOHN 1 : 8.

THAT religion is necessary to our acceptance with God is certain. And were all religion of such a character as to render us acceptable, we should need no lines of demarkation, except between religion and

irreligion. But we find the Scriptures filled with discriminations between that religion which is genuine and that which is spurious. To draw these discriminating lines is a leading object of the whole epistle which furnishes our text. Two classes of discriminating marks are placed before us; the one describing true religion as distinguished from false; and the other describing the false as distinguished from the true. To the last of these two classes belongs the passage which I have selected for my text. To prepare us to understand and apply the important truth which it inculcates, it concerns us,

First, to ascertain whether the discriminating mark which it presents is to be understood as full proof of a *graceless state*. Some may imagine it to be a mark which only denotes a low degree of piety, yet not an entire destitution of it. This then is the first thing which it behooves us to ascertain. Is our saying "that we have no sin," (in the sense of this passage,) full proof that we have no religion, that is, none which is genuine? That it is declared to be full proof of this, I think is very evident.

1. All the other marks of discrimination, which are laid down in this epistle, appear to be decisive, either for or against our religion. This makes it reasonable to believe that the mark laid down in the text is so to be considered. Some of the other tests of character, with which this epistle abounds, are as follows: "We know that we have passed from death unto to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death." Again, "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth

God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God." Again, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." It is in harmony with the whole epistle; and the Scriptures in general, to understand the unfavorable criterion which is now before us, whatever it is, to be decisive proof of unregeneracy.

2. The language of the text itself indicates it to be a decisive mark—a mark designed to prove, not a low degree of piety, but an entire destitution of it. Two different expressions are used, both of which imply such a destitution. "If we say that we have no sin, *we deceive ourselves*, and *the truth is not in us*." The expression, "*we deceive ourselves*," implies an entire mistake in relation to our character. The meaning is not, that we deceive ourselves in thinking that we are so perfect as to have no sin; but rather, in thinking that we are the subjects of regeneration. This is what the apostles Paul and James meant by *deception*; when the one said, "If a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, *he deceiveth himself*," and the other, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but *deceiveth his own heart*, this man's religion is *vain*."

But if the expression, *we deceive ourselves*, might intend something less than an entire mistake concerning our character, the other expression, namely, *the truth is not in us*, shows that nothing less than an entire destitution of grace can be intended. This same expression occurs in the early part of the next chapter; and in that place a destitution of grace is clear-



ly meant. The passage is this: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and *the truth is not in him.*" For any one to have the truth in him, implies something more than a speculative orthodoxy. It is to have the heart brought into conformity to the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost. This truth which lives and abides in the heart, is that which makes the saint differ from the sinner; therefore, to be destitute of this makes the sinner to differ from the saint.

But there is no necessity of my dwelling on this part of the subject; since among those who are quite disagreed as to the meaning of the text, considered as a whole, there is not, to my knowledge, any disagreement as to the point which I am now seeking to establish; all agree that they who, in the spirit of the text, say they have no sin, are in reality under its complete dominion.

Second. The matter being established, by concession as well as by fair exposition, that they who assert that *they have no sin*, evince their entire destitution of holiness, it next concerns us to ascertain what we are to understand by this assertion. This is the hinge on which the whole subject turns. A mistake here may prove a serious injury to the cause of truth.

There is a sense in which God claims for all the subjects of grace, that they are perfect,—that they do no iniquity, and do not commit sin. Now in the same sense in which He claims perfection and freedom from sin for his children, they may claim it for themselves, without incurring the charge of hypo-

crisy. Whatever degree of holiness the Scriptures authorize us to believe that any of the children of God attain to in the present life, to that degree an individual believer may profess to have attained, and yet not subject himself to be considered as a graceless man. But to say, in the sense of the text, *I have no sin*, would be decisive evidence against him. Hence it is indubitable, that the thing which the apostle declares to be such a sure index of self-deception, can be nothing else than a claim to an *entire sinlessness*, either by asserting that we have *never sinned*, or that we are *completely sanctified*. One or the other must undoubtedly be intended. And I am persuaded that a careful investigation of the matter will enable us to decide which it is : whether an exemption from all past, or from all present depravity. That the latter, namely, an exemption from all present depravity, by means of a complete sanctification, is the thing intended, I will now attempt to show.

1st. This interpretation is the most *obvious*. The assertion, “ we *have* no sin,” being in the present tense, most naturally implies a claim to a present exemption from a state of depravity. It would hardly be natural to give such a construction to this assertion as to make it imply a claim to a perfection of character running back to the birth.

2dly. It is incredible that any of the members of the Christian church should aver that they had never sinned ; and yet it is evident that church members were the very persons designed to be reached by this mark of hypocrisy. If in a world so evidently depraved as this, and a world where a remedial system is

known to have been introduced, any portion of its inhabitants are heard to say, "we have no sin," it is altogether most natural to suppose they refer to their *improved*, rather than to their original character; and certainly if they who make the assertion belong to the church of Christ, which is a community wholly composed of such as profess to be redeemed by his blood, we are constrained to understand them to refer to what they are as *Christians*, not to what they are as men. Surely it could never have been anticipated that any would presume to say, that from the beginning of their days they had never been defiled with sin, and yet claim to be disciples of JESUS; whose very name was an open declaration, that to save his people from their sins was his errand into the world.

3dly. The interpretation of the text which I have adopted, is much confirmed, if not made certain, by the *history* of the church. Facts often prove to be good expositors of Scripture. Now it is a well known fact, that the Christian church has had members who have claimed for themselves a perfect *deliverance* from sin; but I know not that any professed Christian, or even any other man, has ever seriously declared that in all his life he had never committed a sin. It is well known that there have been heretics, whose doctrines and practices have disgraced the Christian name, who have at the same time made pretensions to a sinless perfection—a perfection which they claimed to have received from Christ. But where are the heretics who have presumed to say, that before their acquaintance with Christ, even

from their birth, they were free from all the stains of sin? Now if a case of this kind has never been known to occur, while cases of the other kind, and some of them of a very flagrant character, have occurred with frequency, is it not reasonable to believe, that it was the evil which was foreseen that was provided against, rather than the one which was never to come into existence?

4thly. There is something in the context, to render this interpretation of the text probable; unless we should believe *spotless* holiness to be the only contrast there is to an unregenerate life: and few, even among the Perfectionists, go to this extreme. The apostle had just declared, "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness," (that is, live in sin,) "we lie, and do not the truth." He then added, "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from *all* sin." Now since he had declared, that living in sin was evidence against the genuineness of one's religion, also that true Christians are cleansed from all sin, it seemed proper that he should guard against such a misconstruction of what he had said, as would lead them to imagine he taught the doctrine that all the saints were absolutely sinless characters. There was an evident call for him to disavow such a sentiment, and here was the place to do it. Now, provided it be true not only that some of the saints, but even all of them have a degree of sin remaining in their hearts, it was natural that in this connection he should state the fact; and that for the twofold

purpose, first, of preserving from despair those who are deeply sensible of the remains of depravity which cleave to them; and secondly, of undermining the hopes of such as think they have already attained to perfection. If the Spirit of inspiration intended by the words of the text, to teach that *some* of God's children are sinfully imperfect, it was clearly his intention to teach that this is true, in relation to them *all*.

I am aware that this explanation which I have given of the text, is thought, by our opponents, to be set aside by the next verse but one in succession, which reads thus: "If we say that we *have not sinned*, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." But how does this set it aside? How does this prove, that in the text the present tense is used for the past? If one tense must reign, and the other submit, is it not reasonable that the past should submit to the present; since this was the tense which was first used; but more especially since the history of the church is not known to have furnished a single example of such a heresy, as would justify us in making the tense of the text submit to that of the context?

Is it not more rational to understand the averment which is made by these heretics, when they say, "We have not sinned," to refer to that period of their life which was subsequent to their conversion, or to that crisis in their religious experience, when they thought they were sanctified, (that is, completely,) rather than to understand it to refer to their whole life, reaching back to the day wherein they

were born? But should we grant, that it might have been the design of a verse in our context, to put the church on her guard against a heresy which she has never yet known, this can afford no sufficient reason why we should not understand our text to describe a heresy which has an actual existence, and which has sometimes appeared in such a loathsome garb, as to frighten the more sober part of the same brotherhood.

5thly. I will now refer you to several parallel passages which give confirmation to our construction of the text. In one of these the demand is made, "Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" In another we are told, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." In the first of these passages it seems to be taken for granted, that not an individual can be found on earth who has any right to say, "I am pure from my sin." But the

\* In the second chapter of this epistle, there is a similar example of the change of tenses. The apostle says, "*I write* unto you, fathers,—*I write* unto you, young men:" and then he changes the tense by saying, "*I have written* unto you, fathers,—*I have written* unto you, young men." But when he says, "*I have written* unto you," there is no reason to suppose that he refers to any other epistle than that which he was then writing. So in the first chapter, there seems no reason to doubt that it is the same sentiment that he first communicates in the use of the present tense, which he afterwards expresses in the past; viz. this: That a claim to an entire freedom from sin, is decisive proof that the truth has no lodgment in the heart.

other supposes, that there is a whole generation—a perpetuated generation—who are pure in their own eyes, when in God's sight they are wholly impure, having never been washed from their filthiness.

In the commencement of the book of Job, we hear the Lord declare concerning him, that he was a perfect man, and that there was not his like in the earth; and yet in a subsequent part of the book we hear Job make this declaration concerning himself: "If I say I am perfect, it shall prove me perverse." If we take these two declarations in connection, they entirely agree with the teaching of our apostle. He labors to show that those who have fellowship with a God of holiness do not walk in darkness, do not live in sin; for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. And yet he adds, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." The Lord declared that Job was a perfect man; and there was a sense in which this was true, else the Lord would never have made such a declaration. There was also a sense in which Job could not say that he was perfect, without its proving him perverse. There is a sense in which it is proper to say of good men, that they do not commit sin; and yet there is another sense in which their claiming to be without sin, is an evidence against the soundness of their piety.

6thly. I will mention one reason more for adopting the belief, that by the assertion, "We have no sin," is meant a claim, not to an immaculate innocence, but to an entire sanctification. And my reason is this: that such a construction of the text has no collision, but an evident agreement with the common repre-



sensation which the Scriptures make of the renovated character. Had the Scriptures made this representation concerning good men in general, or even concerning the best of them, that they arrive at a sinless state while tabernacling in the flesh, then we should be obliged to understand the declaration, "We have no sin," to refer to past rather than to remaining sinfulness; for in that case it might be consistent with truth that at least some of their number should claim a present entire freedom from sin. But as matters are, there seems to be no necessity for so understanding it: for such are the Bible descriptions of good men, whether they are given in the abstract, or in biographical sketches of their lives, as to show us that, while they are the salt of the earth, they are not without their moral defects. "If they sin against thee," said Solomon, "for there is *no man* that sinneth not." This confession of the universal sinfulness of mankind, without excepting any of God's own people, he made in the solemn act of prayer. Again, with the pen of inspiration in his hand, he makes this humiliating record: "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." In accordance with this the apostle James declares, "In many things we offend all"—not that we offend altogether, but that we *all* offend in some degree. In the biographical sketches which we have of some of the best men under both Testaments, certain things are recorded to their disadvantage. Their imperfect sanctification was sometimes made to appear by their external deviations from God's law. This was true concerning such men as Abraham and

Moses and the apostles of Christ. It is evident that the wonderful effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and afterwards, did not complete the sanctification of the apostles. Acts 15: 39. Gal. 2: 11.

Even in externals the children of God are not wholly without spot; but their outward deportment has a nearer conformity to the divine rule than the feelings and affections of their hearts. Holiness and sin do, in the most proper sense, exist in *the hearts* of moral agents, and no where else. Here it is that we get a view of the real beauty of holiness and the deformity of sin. External action is not always a true index of the feelings of the heart. While the Scriptures lead us to expect, that the display of holiness in the lives of the saints will be equal to the strength of the holy principle which is within them; they do not teach us to expect that we shall see as much evil displayed in the external conduct as is found in their hearts. The outside of the cup and platter may be cleansed, while the inside is perfectly filthy; but, in the moral world, as soon as their inside is cleansed, their outside will be clean also. That is, they will be as clean without as they are within.

If the Scripture had left us to form our estimate of the good men and good women, whom it introduces to our acquaintance, merely by those external actions which it attributes to them, it might have been more easy to believe that some of their number were free from sinful imperfection. But to prevent us from thinking of them above what we ought to think, it has made us acquainted with the man within as well as the man without. By the light of God's

word we learn that men may have what is termed a blameless life, while they are conscious that they possess many unsanctified affections. They are conscious of having the flesh lust against the spirit so powerfully, as to prevent their doing the things they would; and yet they are restrained from *overt* acts of transgression—from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Gal. 5: 16, 17. Now it should never be forgotten that in Scripture account, the sin which exists in the heart is both hateful and criminal, even when it is so effectually suppressed as not to be suffered to go forth into external acts of disobedience.

In reading the psalms of David and the epistles of Paul, we become acquainted with the *feelings* as well as the actions of their authors. That their feelings were not wholly of a holy character we are assured by their own testimony. [See Ps. 19: 12; 32: 3-5; 40: 12; 119: 25, 176. Rom. 7: 14-25. Phil. 3: 12-14. 2 Cor. 12: 7.] If such men as David and Paul discovered in their sanctified minds a current of sinful affections, setting up strongly against the work which God's Spirit was carrying on in them, it certainly adds credibility to the interpretation which has been given of the text. "Alas!" said John Newton, "how much faintness and unfruitfulness has the Lord borne with from me. Indeed I am almost continually a burden to myself.—But through mercy the evils I feel are confined within myself: but the Lord keeps me from stumbling outwardly." I do not bring forward the experience of Newton to prove a doctrine, as I do that of David and of Paul: but when the most amiable among the professed disciples of Christ in

these latter days, appear to be conscious of great defects in the obedience of the inner man, at the very time when no blot cleaves to their hands, I think it not improper to refer to them as circumstantial proof that we have not mistaken the language of the Bible saints, when we have represented them as bewailing the power of indwelling sin:—and that we have not mistaken our text in supposing that the condemnation it pronounces on those who say that they have no sin, falls on such as claim to have reached a state of perfect sanctification.

Third. Having *first* shown the dangerous condition of those who deceive themselves when they say that they have no sin; and *secondly* offered reasons, which to my own mind appear satisfactory, for believing that they who thus deceive themselves are such as claim to have attained to perfect *sanctification*; I deem it proper, in the *third* place, to show some reasons why the claim to perfect sanctification, should be considered as decisive proof that they who make it have no sanctification at all.

But here I would remark, that whether the reasons which I shall offer appear forcible or not, there is no appeal from the decision of God's word. If the thing which is condemned in the text, is a claim to the attainment of a perfect sanctification, (and I do not see the least reason for understanding it to mean any thing else,) such claim is declared to be full proof of self-deception, and a destitution of the saving knowledge of divine truth. What if we should think that this ought never to have been placed among the signs of a graceless state; let us remember that the

Author of the Scriptures understands this subject better than we do. Remember that our Divine Teacher said, "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." A doctrine which men applaud as remarkably holy in its nature and tendency, may nevertheless prove to be nothing better than a blighting heresy.

Every error is harmful, but every error is not fatal and does not therefore authorize us to say to the errorist, "I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." But if it be a matter which relates to Christian experience, and of such a nature as to be incompatible with a work of grace in the heart, it cannot be adopted by any of the subjects of grace. And is not the error in question manifestly of this nature? All will grant that those men who have not seen themselves to be sinners, give no evidence that they are saints. To the self-righteous Pharisees Christ said, "But now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." Their insensibility to their spiritual blindness was the argument by which he proved that their blindness still remained. His argument was based on the assumption, that it is not possible we should have our eyes opened by the Spirit of God, and yet not discover the sinfulness of our own heart. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord:" and when this candle is lighted up by the Holy Spirit, it searches all the inward parts of the soul. Every man thus illuminated must know the plague of his own heart. Prov. 20: 27. 1 Kings 8: 38. If the denial of original depravity is a proof of unregeneracy, is not a denial of remain-

ing depravity an equally clear proof of it; provided it be a fact that depravity does still remain in the heart?\*

By the grace of regeneration a principle of holiness is introduced into the heart of a sinner, which gives him a new conviction of the evil nature of sin; and this principle, being preserved by subsequent sanctification, secures a continuance of that conviction. Sanctification is a progressive work. As it progresses, the strength of indwelling sin is diminished. But this very circumstance renders the sin which yet remains a more noticeable object, as well as a more uncomfortable inmate. The progress of holiness in the heart of the Christian improves his spiritual discernment, so that he is enabled to perceive with more distinctness the beauty of holiness and the deformity of sin. The apostle intimates that

\* “ Many there are in the world who find not this law [that is, the law of indwelling sin] in them ; who, whatever they may be taught in the word, have not a spiritual sense and experience of the power of indwelling sin, and that because they are wholly under the dominion of it. They find not that there is darkness and folly in their minds, because they are darkness itself; and darkness will discover nothing. They find not deadness and indisposition in their hearts and wills to God, because they are dead wholly in trespasses and sins.”

*Owen on Indwelling Sin.*

Again the same author remarks, “ It is well with them indeed in whom it [that is, the law of sin] is weakened, and the power of it abated. But yet for them who say it is not in them, they do but deceive themselves, and there is no truth in them.”

the greater advancement Christians make in their religion, the more acute will be their discernment; since "by reason of use they have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Heb. 5: 14. May we not hence conclude, if there is one Christian upon earth, in whose heart the principle of sin is more weakened than in any of his brethren, that he is the one who will be most sensibly burdened with the sin which remains? Though he, beyond any other individual, enjoys that liberty wherewith Christ makes free, yet is there no other man who feels so sensibly his bondage. He is more conformed to the image of Christ than his brethren; and yet he is more grieved than any of them with his want of conformity.

The idea which I am wishing to convey I will now illustrate by something which a child can understand. The difference is great, as you all know, between the inward part of your hand, and the pupil of your eye, as to their sensibility. The eye will sensibly feel a substance altogether less in size and roughness, than one which will lie in your hand without being perceived. The least mote will give pain to your eye. Its greater tenderness is the cause of this difference. Now let us suppose the hand to undergo a gradual transformation from its natural toughness to the tenderness of the eye. As the transforming operation advances, it will be made evident by its increased sensibility: and this will be discovered by the more acute perception you will have of those things which come in contact with it—



even those small substances which once would have been wholly unperceived.

If the sentiment be correct, which supposes the work of sanctification to remain incomplete until the close of our pilgrimage, how is it possible that any of the children of God should make such a mistake as to think themselves already perfect? Their intercourse with God (if nothing else) must serve to keep them apprised of their imperfect sanctification. In prayer they all draw nigh unto God from day to day: and as they grow in grace, their communion with him becomes more intimate. By which means their discoveries of the infinite purity of his nature will be increasingly clear and vivid; and this has a powerful tendency to make them more sensible of their remaining depravity. Hence it is, that men of superior attainments in piety, and especially when in their nearest approaches to God, have been peculiarly affected with the sinfulness of their hearts. We hear one of this description exclaim, "I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts:" and another, "But now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself." Isa. 6: 5. Job 42: 5, 6.

The work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers gives them a clearer understanding of God's law. Therefore as this work advances, their conviction of the great extent and spirituality of the law is increased; and with it their conviction of the existence and evil nature of indwelling corruption; "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." They now very sensibly feel the force of the apostle's confession,

“The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Their clearer views of the perfection of divine requirements, render it more difficult to overlook either their external or internal defects of character. Growth in grace tends to give us not only more enlarged and impressive views of the holiness of the law, but also of the holiness of the gospel. We become more affected with the holy life of our Redeemer, the holy nature of his doctrines, and of that salvation which his death procured for the guilty children of Adam.

If sin has any place in the hearts of believers, it is under their eye wherever they go; how then can they avoid seeing it? Sin is not a dormant, but an active principle. “The flesh *lusteth* against the spirit.” The subjects of grace are burdened with sin more than with any thing else. We can more easily conceive how such a man as Paul might have been unconscious of any smart from the stripes he received on his naked back, or of any inconvenience from having his feet confined in the stocks, when he was shamefully entreated at Philippi, than to conceive how he should have had sin dwelling in his heart, and yet have been unconscious of the fact. When, after this, he exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am!” he seems not to have thought of the stripes, or stocks, or shame. He did not ask who should deliver him from such evils as these. His inquiry was, “Who shall deliver me from the body of *this death*?” It was not the natural evil which he suffered; but the *moral evil* which he did, either by external acts of disobedience, or by internal lustings of the flesh against the

spirit, which gave that poignant distress to his holy mind, and which induced him to call himself a wretched man.

But men who are entirely devoid of holiness have no eye to discern the moral evil there is in sin. Through their aversion to holiness and love to sin, they are prone to form entirely erroneous sentiments concerning the nature of both. "They call evil good, and good evil." They give to selfishness, which is the essence of all the sin in the universe, the name of holiness; especially when it is modeled into the form of religion. By this means they think themselves something, when they are nothing. Now since they can imagine themselves to be converted by a religion which does not infuse any true holiness into their hearts, why may they not imagine themselves to be sanctified, even to perfection, by a religion of this character? They who are described as saying, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou," were such as had no holiness at all. He who said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men," was intended to represent a sect whose religion was wholly unacceptable to a holy God. They who said, "We see," were totally blind. And it was when Paul was without the law, that he was alive. At that period of his life, when he was in reality devoid of holiness, he was nothing like such a sinner in his own sight, as he was afterwards, when grace had not only taken possession of his heart, but had made much progress in subduing its native enmity. It is easier for us to conceive how Paul might have viewed himself to be a sinless man, while he

was totally sinful, than how he could have viewed himself so afterwards. We can more easily see how the man, who is altogether under the blinding influence of sin, can be so deceived as to imagine himself to be perfectly holy, than we can see how the regenerated man, who has some remains of sin, can be ignorant of this fact.\*

### PRACTICAL REMARKS.

1. With this subject before us it may be seen why the great body of Christians, including those denominated the Orthodox, have always viewed *perfection-*

\* It is a clear case that, under the blinding influence of a false religion, men who are in their natural state may imagine themselves to be sinless characters. The more sober part of the Perfectionist school are doubtless convinced, that some of the ultra Perfectionists have given melancholy proof, not only that they were not entirely sanctified, but that they were entirely unsanctified. Now if they agree with us (as many of them profess to do) in the belief that grace is an abiding principle in every heart where it gets possession, these apostacies must serve to convince them, that a man may think himself to be something, yea, every thing, when in reality he is nothing,—that a man may think he has attained to a perfection of holiness, when he is an utter stranger to the thing itself. These apostates furnish a practical demonstration, (so it must appear to all who are believers in the doctrine of the certain perseverance of the saints,) that men who have not a particle of holiness may be so deluded as to imagine themselves to be as pure as the Holy One of Israel.

*ism* as a heresy; whether it be the perfectionism which supposes all the regenerated to be perfect, or that which supposes only a part of them to be so.\* This last branch of perfectionism has not been considered so great a heresy as the other. Nor has a belief that others have arrived at perfection, been considered as equal evidence of an unsound heart, as to believe this concerning ourselves. Yet the very adoption of a sentiment, whose fallacy one would suppose a small knowledge of God's word, together with an experimental knowledge of the workings of a gracious heart, would qualify any Christian to discover, cannot but excite a suspicion that all is not right at the foundation. It excites a fear, lest the holy character of God has been so altered by their scheme of doctrine, as to render it capable of being loved by the carnal mind; lest the law has been so far lowered down as to demand nothing more than external obedience; or lest the sanctification of which it boasts should prove to be something short of true holiness; and its new birth turn out to be nothing more than a being born of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man.

\* The sinful imperfection of all the saints on earth, is one of the leading Articles of Faith, given us by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in their Shorter Catechism. To the question, "Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?" they return this answer: "No mere man, since the fall, is able [that is, morally able—has grace enough] in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed."

Perfectionism, in its least objectionable form, serves to furnish a hiding place for some of the wildest fanatics which have ever been known in the church. From this hiding place there seems to be no way to drive them, except by pulling it down. If you attempt to convince them that they are building on the sand, because they do not *do*, as well as hear the sayings of Christ, they are not disturbed at all. You may convict them of gross profanations of the Sabbath, of the neglect of family and sanctuary worship, and even of flagrant breaches of the seventh commandment; and yet they can reconcile it all with a sinless state. Perhaps they will acknowledge that it might be a sin for *you* to do such things; but in *them* it is no sin, because their minds have become so pure as to sanctify all their acts. Now these deluded fellow-creatures need something to awaken them from their dream. They need the very doctrine furnished by our text. We want to be able to show them, that their very claim to an entire freedom from sin, proves them to be the servants of sin. But the other class of Perfectionists, who agree with us in condemning these wild vagaries and foolish pretensions of theirs to an extraordinary sanctity, do, nevertheless, stand in the way to hinder our pulling down the strong-hold in which their brethren have entrenched themselves. They unite with them in bringing the same passages to support the doctrine of sinless perfection, and they present the same objections to those which we adduce to establish the fact, that the saints on earth are in a state of moral conflict.

2. In the light of this subject, it may be seen, why

it is that some recognition of remaining depravity, serves to augment our confidence in the genuineness of any one's religion. His depravity is surely no part of his religion ; but his discovery of it, especially of its vile and hateful nature, constitutes an essential part of it. If there is no time in the life of the Christian, when he can say in truth, " I have no sin," we wish to see him deeply sensible of this humiliating fact. While his remaining depravity renders him less attractive than he would be, were he perfect, we are pleased to find a distinct recognition of this depravity in the account he gives us of his religious exercises, whether by his mouth or his pen. But why are we pleased ? Not because we are pleased with sin ; or gratified to find other Christians no better than ourselves. But since God himself has described his children on earth as being universally imperfect in their renovated character, and also, as conscious of this imperfection, we wish to see this consciousness, as one, among other evidences, of a sound conversion. When we come across a biography, purporting to be that of a Christian, we are anxious to discover evidence that the man knew the plague of his own heart. Should his journal speak much of his holy affections, and yet make no mention of any conflict with indwelling sin, this circumstance would diminish our hope relative to the genuineness of his religion. Such an account of his sanctified affections, when accompanied with no acknowledgment of remaining depravity, would seem to be a virtual declaration that he had no sin ; and



this we have seen is stigmatized as a striking index of a false hope.

The sins of David form a dark shade in the moral picture of that holy man: but those repeated acknowledgments of his sin, both external and internal, which we find in his Psalms, constitute a very bright part of the picture. And I would say that, in my opinion, *they* greatly err who think they render the *Christian* experience of Paul more attractive, by taking from it that conflict with indwelling sin, of which he gives us such a graphic description in the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans, and placing it among those conflicts which he had before he became a soldier of the cross. According to the views which we have formed of the Christian character, the clear discoveries which the apostle had of his remaining depravity, together with the pungent distress it occasioned him, are among the brightest evidences both of the soundness of his conversion, and of his uncommon advancement in the divine life.

In this connection, suffer me to introduce a few short extracts from the biographies of Payson and Brainerd, two men whose characters have been generally known in the religious world. In both these biographies, there is nothing more prominent than their acknowledgment of sinful imperfection. Payson, in a letter to his mother, has this remark: "I have long considered a growing acquaintance with the desperate wickedness and surpassing deceitfulness of the heart, as almost the only mark of a real Christian which Satan cannot counterfeit." At a later period of life, his journal furnishes us with this

striking confession of his remaining depravity: "I used to think that repentance and confession bore some small proportion to my sins; but now there seems to be no more proportion between them than between finite and infinite. I can see that I once trusted much to my repentance, but now my repentance seems one of my worst sins, on account of its exceeding imperfection." He adds, "I see more and more how exceedingly little there is of spirituality in my best affections." Brainerd at a certain time exclaims, "Oh, the pressure of a body of death!" At another time he says, "I do not remember ever to have had more clear apprehensions of religion in my life: but found a struggle in the evening with spiritual pride." Late in life, while taking a retrospect of what was past, he remarks, "I could discover much corruption attending my best duties, many selfish views and carnal ends, much spiritual pride and self-exaltation, and innumerable other evils which compassed me about."

3. It may be fairly inferred from this subject, that an expectation of arriving at a sinless state in the present life is not the necessary, nor the best means for the improvement of the Christian character. The force of this inference will be felt by all those who believe that the doctrine of the text has been correctly stated; for surely none will pretend that false representations constitute any proper means of grace. By placing a stigma on all pretensions to sinless perfection in the present life, God seems clearly to have taught us that he does not design to bring the work of sanctification to such perfection, even in

a single instance. He has hereby shown that those words which he had spoken long before by the mouth of Solomon, declaring, "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not," were designed to apply to every part and period of the world. If it is clearly revealed that there is never on the earth a just man who is sinless, and that there is no one who can claim such perfection, without its proving him perverse, it is certain that God has not made the expectation of attaining to such perfection while on earth, the necessary means of stirring up his people to press toward the mark. Must we believe that the latter-day glory of the church is to burst upon the world this year, or even the next, to prompt us to pray and use other means to hasten its introduction? We acknowledge that on our part and that of our fellow-men, it is sin which keeps back the Millennium a single year. We also acknowledge that on the part of the saints there is no excuse for the least degree of imperfection. God's command and our obligation are the same: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

I hope, my brethren, that you will not consider a discourse which is designed to show the sinful imperfection of saints, to be the same as an apology for their remaining sinfulness. You might as well say that a sermon, which proves that all the unregenerate are in a state of total depravity, constitutes an apology for that depravity; and that a sermon, which proves that sinners are so wicked that they will never repent without the special grace of God, is a justification of their impenitence. My object has been to show that

it is a fact, a humiliating fact, that the best Christians on earth are sinfully imperfect; and that all pretensions to sinless perfection are to be considered as proofs of self-ignorance. Now if this be truth, it is undoubtedly adapted to promote, and not to retard the work of sanctification. But while error is always dangerous, even truth is liable to be perverted. Some of us may flatter ourselves that we are real Christians, merely because we make no pretensions to be perfect Christians. But we ought to remember that a claim to complete deliverance from sin, is not the only mark of self-deception which is found in the Bible. There is another mark of it that stands in the neighborhood of the text, which is equally infallible; it is this: "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." If our believing that all saints are sinfully imperfect, makes us think more lightly of the evil of sin, it is a manifest abuse of the doctrine, and is no symptom in our favor. If our belief makes us remiss in seeking after great attainments in piety, where is the evidence that we love holiness? While, with Paul, we profess not to have already attained to perfection, let us, with him, make perfection the mark toward which, laying aside every weight, we constantly press.

The personal holiness of saints is a matter of immense importance. In relation to the true riches, as well as to the wealth of this world, it is the hand the diligent that maketh rich. To *accumulate*, must be the Christian's daily business. The command is not only "*Have* grace," but "*Grow* in grace."

“Herein,” said Christ, “is my Father glorified, that ye bear *much fruit*: so shall ye be my disciples.” The bearing of much fruit will both glorify God and evince our discipleship. But we shall bear no such fruit as will glorify God, except we have a vital union to the true Vine: and to enable us to bear much fruit, the union must be intimate. May our attention to the means of grace be so diligent, and our attainments in piety so manifest, that they, who are disposed to impute our belief in the doctrine of the moral imperfection of Christians, to the meagerness of our desires after holiness, may be convinced of their mistake. In this way we shall do honor to the Orthodox creed, and at the same time do honor to that worthy name by which we are called.

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## LECTURE XII.

THE CHURCH, HAVING BEAUTIES AS WELL AS DEFORMITIES, CLAIMS THAT THE REPULSIVENESS OF THE LATTER SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO CONCEAL THE ATTRACTIONS OF THE FORMER.

“I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black.”—*Song of Solomon*, 1: 5, 6.

The Song of Solomon was incorporated with the other sacred books, long before the advent of the Savior. Had it been, what some seem to suppose, a

common nuptial song, foisted into the sacred writings, he would have exposed it. But since he made no exception to this book, the direction which he gave us to search the Scriptures, must lay us under obligation to search this in common with the other canonical books, and to search it with an expectation that we shall find that which shall make us better acquainted with Him and with ourselves.

They who believe that this book is entitled to a place in God's word, will doubtless be agreed in the common opinion, that it describes that holy union existing between Christ and his Church, illustrated by the conjugal relation. The "fair one" of this song is evidently a mystical bride, and not a literal wife; for although she is most commonly addressed as an individual, and is said to be *one*, even the only one of her mother; yet at other times she is spoken of as a complex person, or an assemblage of individuals. In the verse which stands immediately before the text, she prays thus: "Draw *me*, *we* will run after thee." Soon after we have passed the text, we find her compared to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. In another place, she is compared to a flock of sheep; and then again, to an army, and to a company of two armies.

The Church, when considered as the object of Christ's love, is the *spouse*; but when she is considered as bringing forth converts, she is a *mother*. And while, in her collective capacity, she is spoken of as the mother, her converts, especially in their individual capacity, are represented to be her *sons* and *daughters*. By "the daughters of Jerusalem,"

mentioned in the text, may be intended not only her converts, but also her covenant seed who are not yet, in the completest sense, brought into her communion. The daughters of Jerusalem may even comprehend all the dwellers at Jerusalem, or all such as are living under the means of grace, and enjoying the benefit of the instructions, prayers and examples of God's people.

This book assumes the form of a dialogue. The text is the language of the church, Christ's mystical spouse. She here confesses her deformity, by the declaration, I am *black*; also by comparing herself to the tents of Kedar; and yet she asserts her beauty, by saying, I am *comely*, and intimating her resemblance to the curtains of Solomon. But the beauty and deformity of which she speaks are wholly of a moral nature, having no reference to the complexion of the face, but to that of the mind. The deformity which she confesses is sinful, therefore hateful; and the beauty which she claims is the beauty of holiness: which therefore rendered her lovely.

When she says "Look not upon me because I am black," let it not be understood that she refuses to be seen. Her Husband, the heavenly Bridegroom, invites attention to his bride. He designs she should be, in a spiritual sense, the light of the world; and has therefore given her a place of great conspicuity, like a city on a hill, that her light may be seen at a greater distance, and that it may exert a mightier influence on the surrounding darkness. But the church is to be here understood as addressing a caution to her members, whether adult or infant, and perhaps even



to all others who might have become acquainted with her existence and her claims, to be careful not to undervalue her on account of her moral defects, nor suffer her deformity to cause them to overlook her comeliness, so as to induce them to think lightly of her divine Lord, or of the religion whereby she is distinguished from the rest of the world.

There are two prominent thoughts in the text, namely, first, that the church of Christ on earth possesses the opposite characteristics of *deformity* and *beauty* ; secondly, that the repulsiveness of the one ought not to make us overlook the attractions of the other.

I. It seems clearly taught in the text, that the church of Christ has a mixed character, partly deformed, and partly beautiful. "I am *black*, but *comely*." As a specimen of this mixed character she represents her devotions to be so dissimilar, as to be at one time ineffectual, and at another prevalent. Chap. 3: 1-4. She also acknowledges that at one time spiritual drowsiness had so benumbed her senses, as to lead her to excuse herself for not arising from her bed to open the door to her Beloved. Yet there was soon so great a change in her feelings towards him, that she arose to open the door ; and when she perceived he had withdrawn himself, she could not rest till she had found him whom her soul loved. In one part of this account, which she gives of herself, we are furnished with evidences of her deformity ; in the other, of her comeliness. Chap. 5: 2-8.

The mixed character of the church is attributable to two causes : the first of which is the imperfection

of her genuine members, even those who are not only of Israel, but who are Israelites indeed. In all the regenerated members of the church there is some real comeliness, but there is also some real deformity: "for there is not a just man on earth who doeth good and sinneth not." So far as the just man doeth good he is amiable; but so far as he sinneth he is unlovely. They who are born of the Spirit are spiritual. After God they are created in righteousness and true holiness. Their love to God and men is without dissimulation. Their repentance is such as needeth not to be repented of; and their faith worketh by love, purifying their hearts. Their humility is unfeigned; their prayer is communion with God, and their good works are the fruit of a sanctified heart.

Had these regenerated ones no contrary traits of character, they would have comeliness without any mixture of deformity. They would then, like the Bridegroom himself, be *altogether* lovely. But it is not so. The most spiritual members of the Church on earth have to confess, that they are black as well as comely. The man after God's own heart, at one time, is heard to say, "I am holy;" but at another, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up;"—at one time, "My soul followeth hard after thee;" at another, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

Since there is no man who, in the sinless sense of the word, can say, "I am *perfect*," without proving himself perverse by the very assertion, there must be some depravity remaining in the best of men, some darkness in the brightest lights of the church.

In all those traits of character which serve to constitute their moral beauty, they are deficient. While they possess affections which are disinterested, they are by no means free from such as are selfish. Their repentance, which is genuine as to its nature, is deficient in degree ; and they often repeat those sins, over which they have mourned. This is particularly true in relation to the sins of the heart. After they have received Christ as their Savior, their whole Savior, they find a dreadful propensity to go about to establish their own righteousness. It is true that they are humble ; but it is also true that pride lurks within, and is sometimes manifested in their external conduct. See 2 Sam. 24 : 10. 2 Chron. 32 : 31. Fervency does not characterize all the prayers of the saints. Their prayers are often comparatively cold and formal. Instead of their always pressing to the mark, as they should, they are sometimes sliding back, and losing the ground which had once been gained.

It appears then that the church would have a mixed character, if it contained no members except real saints ; for in all these are found the two conflicting principles denominated *flesh* and *spirit*, the one being black and the other comely. Gal. 5 : 17. But there is another class of members, and it is no inconsiderable class, who are as perfect strangers to the new birth as if they were not found in the commonwealth of Israel. That there exist in our *world* two distinct classes of men, such as love God, and such as hate him ; such as are for Christ, and such as are against him ; such as are born of God, and such as re-

main under the power of sin, is very clearly revealed. Nor is it any less clearly revealed that both these moral classes are found in the *church*. What else can be taught but this, when the kingdom of heaven is compared to a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind? Or when it is likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom, five of whom had oil in their vessels, while the other five had none? Is not the same thing represented by the fruitful and unfruitful branches in a vine-tree, and by the wheat and chaff which lie together on the threshing floor? Matt. 13. 47: 25, 1-10. John 15: 2. Luke 3: 17.

Truth and error, those perfect opposites, are both found in the church, which is designed to be "the pillar and ground of the truth." The one serves to make her appear comely, and the other deformed. The truth, which she exhibits in her creeds, and in the ministrations of the word, give her a comely appearance: but in proportion as she has adopted heretical sentiments in her creeds, or sustained them by her ministry, she has marred her beauty. The unsanctified part of the church, having no inward relish for the truth, are always seeking to exchange it for error, which to them is more palatable. With them false teachers are more acceptable, than they who fearlessly declare all the counsel of God. There have been times, in which the prophets of Baal outnumbered the prophets of the Lord. When we look at these features of the visible church, we are ready to exclaim, how black, how uncomely! But this leads me to show.

II. That the repulsiveness of her deformity ought not to make us overlook the attractions of her beauty. "*Look not upon me, because I am black—Despise me not, because you discover defects in me—because you do not find me altogether lovely.*" To enable us to see how unreasonable it is, to suffer the unsightly things which appear in the church, to cause us either to overlook or undervalue her excellencies, let the following things be well considered:

1. Her beauty, as far as it obtains, is none the less lovely and commendable, on account of her deformity. Things which are lovely and praiseworthy, do not become unlovely and blameworthy, because they co-exist with things of a contrary character, in the same society, or even in the same individual. Though *merit* and *demerit* cannot belong to the same person; since a single transgression, according to the tenor of the Divine law, exposes to an endless punishment; therefore future acts of obedience have no power to destroy that guilt which has been once contracted; yet such acts of obedience are in themselves as lovely, as if they had not been preceded by transgression. If holiness and sin can both exist at the same time, in the same individual, the holy principle, as far as it prevails, is beautiful and amiable. That body of death under which Paul groaned, and which he calls the law in his members, should not make us undervalue the excellency of the law of his mind, under the influence of which he rendered a sincere obedience to the commands of God.

The Christian's faith, repentance and humility, constitute amiable traits of character, notwithstanding

ing the unbelief, impenitence and pride, which still remain to mar his beauty. That faith, which prompted Abraham to go up to mount Moriah, to offer his son at God's command, gives a lustre to his character, though at another time, through weakness of faith, he was led to deny that Sarah was his wife. We have a right to condemn that pusillanimity which Peter manifested, on a certain occasion, in dissembling and withdrawing from the Gentile converts; but it would be unreasonable to let this instance of his cowardice prejudice us against all that holy boldness which he manifested on the day of Pentecost, and on other occasions. The meek and quiet spirit, for which Moses was distinguished above all other men, was in the sight of God of great price, notwithstanding there was an instance in which he was so provoked, that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. After Paul and Barnabas, as fellow-workers to the kingdom of God, had travelled together for years, they had a sharp contention. This proved them to be imperfect men; but it would be wrong to let this circumstance make us overlook all that was amiable in their character and conduct. This one contention which they had, does not authorize us to say of them, that they were men of a contentious and quarrelsome spirit.

If amiable traits of character ought not to be despised, even when the same person exhibits those which are of a contrary nature, what can be more unreasonable than to think lightly of the subjects of grace, merely because men destitute of grace are associated with them, in the same religious society?

The saint and the sinner, in the case now supposed, are entirely different persons; as much so as if one was in the church, and the other in the world. Wheat and tares are plants of a different species, and are just as different when they grow in the same field, as when they are found apart. There is no propriety in calling wheat a weed, because weeds surround it, and impede its growth; nor in calling the lily a thorn, because it grows among thorns. Nor is there any more propriety in undervaluing the spiritual members of Christ's church, because men of a different character have found their way into its sacred inclosures.

Who will be so uncandid, as to condemn all the apostles as traitors, because Judas was numbered with them, and obtained part of their ministry? Paul was a minister of the word, at the same period with Phygellus and Hermogenes, Hymeneus, and Philetus, and other heretical teachers. Must he therefore be branded as a heretic, because he was a cotemporary with these men? In John's third epistle, we have the names of two men, who were probably ministers of the word in the same quarter, if not in the same church; but the characters which are ascribed to them, form a perfect contrast: the one being haughty and overbearing, while the other had a good report of all men, and of the truth itself. How wrong it must be to confound characters which are so dissimilar, merely because both are found in the church of Christ. We will not say that Christ's spiritual members are not blameworthy, for neglecting those means, which are adapted to keep the



church more free from members of a contrary character ; but, aside from this consideration, they are none the less worthy of regard, than they would be, if the whole church were made up of real Christians.

2. Since God claims the church as his own, in distinction from all other societies on earth, and describes its excellences as superior to them all ; to despise and condemn the church must be aggravated impiety. This is the kingdom which the God of heaven has set up in this revolted world. They who are enrolled among its members are denominated “the congregation of the Lord”—“the people of the Lord”—“the church of God”—“the church of Christ”—“the city of the Lord”—“the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” The Lord declares he has chosen this city for his habitation, and that he loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of this city of God. He calls it “the mount of his holiness”—“the perfection of beauty”—“the joy of the whole earth.”

In this sacred Song, from which our text is taken, Christ speaks much in commendation of his spouse the church. He calls her “the fairest among women.” He compares her to a lily among thorns. The lily, which is a beautiful flower, appears to peculiar advantage when viewed in contrast with the unsightly thorns by which it is surrounded. After comparing the church to a dove in the clefts of the rock, the heavenly Bridegroom says, “Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.” In the fourth chapter he enters into somewhat of a minute descrip-

tion of her beauty ; and in the sixth, he addresses her in language like this: ‘Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.’ Again: ‘Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?’

Now since Christ has said so much in favor of the moral beauty of his spouse, in what light must he view *them* who speak of her with a kind of sovereign contempt,—as if, instead of the fairest among women, she was the most deformed. Such men seem determined to make God a liar ; as if what he had said in commendation of his church was false, and what could not be justified by facts. Christ does not deny that his church has defects—many and great: and yet he speaks of it as if it were the best society which can be found on the earth. I will venture to appeal to men of reading on this point, whether Christian countries have not, by means of their religion, experienced a moral elevation, above those countries which remain under pagan idolatry, or which have embraced the religion of the Arabian prophet. And will they not have the candor to acknowledge, that *the church of Christ*, with all its defects, is nevertheless the more excellent part of Christendom’s population?

Some will perhaps grant that Christ’s *real* disciples are better than other men, so as to deserve to be called the salt of the earth. But they talk as if they imagined that the greater part of the real disciples were to be found without, rather than within the pale of the church. I will not say that Christ

has no such disciples who remain without the pale of the visible church; but nothing can be more unreasonable than to believe that a majority of this class of disciples remain there. So I think it must appear to all who will candidly attend to such considerations as these:

1st. The visible church is divinely instituted, having its officers, ordinances and discipline appointed by Christ himself. Now what can be more natural than that they who truly embrace his religion should spontaneously resort to the church as to their home? We expect to find the children in their father's house.

2dly. Christ has explicitly commanded his disciples to repair to this standard which he has pitched. He has commanded them to confess him before men. This requisition they never fully comply with, till they become baptized in his name, or ratify their infant baptism by taking their place among those who commemorate his dying love in the ordinance of the supper. Love to Christ will naturally influence us to render obedience to this, as well as to his other requirements.

3dly. Since Christ has proclaimed his church to be the light of the world, and compared it to a city which is so elevated that it cannot be hid, is it not rational to believe that he will, as a common thing, incline the hearts of those whom he brings under the reign of grace, to attach themselves to it, that thus their light may be seen to the greatest advantage? Had it been his purpose to suffer an equal portion of the subjects of grace to stay back with the world, as he should induce to come into his church, he would

not have described the latter as having such a decided superiority over the former; he would never have called the church the light of the world.

I would *next* observe, that it must be highly improper to make the imperfection of the church a reason for setting her at nought, since an imperfect comeliness is all which is claimed for her, either by herself or her divine Lord. The visible church, as it is described in the Scriptures, is a society composed partly of imperfect saints and partly of hypocrites. Is it not most unreasonable to doubt the inspiration of the Scriptures, because the church is found to answer to the description which God has there given of it? The Scriptures speak of it as being peculiar to its heavenly state, to be purged from all its corrupt members, and to have its sound members freed from every vestige of corruption. The best members of the church are far from thinking that the society to which they belong is without fault. They have no wish that their neighbors should consider them to be, in the highest sense, faultless characters. The *perfect pattern* for imitation is not the church, but Christ himself.

Furthermore, nothing can be more palpably wrong than to despise the church on account of its imperfection; and even make its imperfection a reason for calling in question the truth of the Christian religion; since it is revealed to be the plan of infinite wisdom, to proceed by degrees in the work of recovering men from entire sinfulness to entire holiness. This plan of God furnishes no apology for the hypocrisy of false brethren, nor the imperfection of true believers:

but it does furnish a reason why such a glorious work as the redemption of lost men should not be despised, merely because it is carried on by degrees. While the holiness of God stands pledged to keep hypocrites from entering within the gates of the New Jerusalem, it is not thus pledged to prevent the enemy from sowing tares in his field here on earth. Nor has he promised to perfect the work of sanctification in the hearts of his own children, until the time arrives when they are to be received up into glory.

How unreasonable it must be to vilify the church, when considered as a divinely constituted society, because it has not already attained to the perfection of its heavenly state. What is this short of disputing the propriety of God's setting up a kingdom of heaven on earth, unless he shall engage immediately to remove from it the whole of its earthly character, and at once raise it to the standard of heaven itself? Is it so, that God has no right to have any kingdom on earth, unless he shall cause its purity to equal that of his upper kingdom? Who will dare to say that a church, imperfect in holiness, is not preferable to no church at all? Or who can certainly determine, all things considered, that the present is not the best possible plan? It would be limiting the Holy One of Israel, to say that he has not power to make a perfect church on earth, by keeping out of it every false convert, and by completing the work of sanctification in his saints at the same moment it is commenced: but this is clearly not the plan he has adopted. And who has a right to say that the plan which he has adopted is not the very best?

The subject before us is highly *practical*.

1. It bids us beware of *perfectionism*. That Christians are under obligation to be perfect, even in the fullest sense, is clear. Such obligation rests on all men. But to assert it as a fact, that all men are perfect, in the sinless sense of the word, or that any are so, is contrary to the word of God. Zion is the perfection of beauty, prospectively considered; yea, her beauty even now is, in its nature, perfect, because the beauty of the Lord her God is upon her. But while the earth is her residence, her beauty is incomplete; she is black as well as comely. So she is described in the text, and in the whole of that sacred Song from which the text is taken: and so is she described in all the sacred volume. Though she is making progress by coming up from the wilderness, yet a sinful imperfection belongs to her through all the stages of her pilgrimage, till she reaches the land of promise. The sentiments of Perfectionists of every class, are calculated to promote infidelity, by representing the church to be what it is not: or, at least, a portion of its members to be what none of them are seen to be. "But now I forbear," said Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, "lest any man should think of me above that he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me." Let those who are advocating the doctrine of a sinless perfection, as their actual attainment, take the hint from the apostle, and forbear, lest any should think of them above what he seeth them to be, or what he heareth of them; lest by finding no such church or church-members, as *they* claim to be, he should be led to think lightly of

the religion of Christ and of its claims to a divine origin.

2. This subject admonishes us to seek a more solid foundation on which to rest a title to the heavenly inheritance than *mere membership in the church below*—not, however, because there is not an infallible connection between grace and glory—but because we may have a membership in the church below, without possessing grace; while nothing short of our knowing the grace of God in truth, will procure us a place in the church above. Our name may be enrolled on the records of a church, even one of the purest there is on earth, and yet not be found in the Lamb's book of life. A certificate of good and regular standing in the church-militant will not be enough to secure us an admission into the church-triumphant. Therefore it was that Peter, when addressing himself to such as had a standing in the militant church, exhorted them to give diligence to make their calling and election sure, that so an entrance might be ministered to them into the everlasting kingdom of Christ.

3. This subject cautions us not to suffer *the imperfection of the church to drive us into infidelity*. If what some insinuate were actually true, namely, that Christ's church is the most corrupt society on earth; and that whoever becomes a member of it is thereby deteriorated in his morals, it would form a weighty argument against the divine origin of his religion. But merely the circumstance, that the enemy is permitted to sow tares in Christ's field; also, that the good seed does not immediately come to perfection,



can form no solid objection against the truth of his religion. Can any pretend that the precepts of Christ have no adaptation to improve the human character? Or can they fault His examples, as if they were unworthy of imitation? And will not every candid man acknowledge, that many of the professed disciples of Christ have been the excellent of the earth? What if some of them have been vile, and all of them have come short of heavenly perfection; does this make it right to treat both Christ and his church with contempt? Much good has already been accomplished by the Gospel; and is it not ungenerous to refuse to give it credit for the moral victories it has achieved in a sinful world, because there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed—much good to be accomplished?

4. This subject shows the insufficiency of the most common of all the reasons which are offered for refusing to become the disciples of Christ. Almost every sinner who is personally addressed and urged to become a Christian, tries to stop the mouth of his minister or other pious friend by referring to the impurity of the church and the unexemplary lives of the professors of religion. This reason is often urged, not only by infidels, but by those who believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures. We can say, that we heartily wish there were not so many unlovely things in the church, to hinder the salvation of those who are standing without. But we are grieved that our fellow-men, who are under infinite obligation to bow their necks to the yoke of Christ, and who are also in perishing need of his salvation, should imagine they

have a good excuse for not bowing their necks to his yoke and receiving his salvation, on account of the unsightly things which they discover in *us* who profess to be his disciples. We do not ask them to imitate our faults; but we have a right to say, Look not upon us because we are black—Do not overlook that comeliness which Christ has put upon us—Do not undervalue our good members, merely because all our members are not such: neither underrate their excellencies, because they have their defects,—because they have not yet arrived to the stature of men. We say this, not so much in vindication of ourselves, as from a tender concern for *you*. We have not forgotten that our Master said, “Wo unto the world because of offences.” We are by no means insensible of the fact, that there are many offences and great occasions of stumbling now existing in the church, which exert a dreadful influence to prevent the men of the world from coming over to the standard of reconciliation. While we do not exonerate ourselves from blame, for throwing these stumbling-blocks in your way, we entreat you to avoid stumbling over them to your utter ruin. What if some of us, yea, many of us perish; will our misery render yours more tolerable? Let me say to those who are standing without: If you wait for the church to become faultless, you will never unite with it in this world. Or if you wait for it to arrive at such a degree of perfection as to remove your objections, you will doubtless die and end your probation, before it comes up to the mark which you have prescribed for it.

5. The light reflected by this subject will help us

see the impropriety of *their* conduct *who withdraw themselves from the Lord's table*, (and perhaps from the church,) because they have discovered among its members one individual or more, in whose piety they can have no confidence. Did they not know that the church was black as well as comely? Did they expect to find the kingdom of heaven to resemble a net which, when cast into the sea, takes no fish except such as are good? Or did they expect it to resemble a company of virgins going forth to meet the bridegroom, all of whom should have lamps burning and shining? If such were their expectations, it is clear that it was not the word of God which excited them. But if they came into the communion of the church knowing it to be an imperfect society, why do these evidences of its imperfection induce them to withdraw from participating in its ordinances? Do they not know that by withdrawing they renounce the fellowship of the worthy members, as well as of the unworthy? Yea, they renounce the fellowship of the Head, as well as of the members. What should we have thought of the eleven apostles, had they all left the table, at the head of which sat their divine Lord, as soon as they had ascertained the fact that they had a fellow-disciple there who was at heart a traitor! I will not say that there is no branch of the visible church so corrupt, as to impose an obligation on its sound members, after testifying against those corruptions which they have no power to remove, to leave its communion for one of a purer character. Rev. 18: 4. But surely it cannot be right for us, who have come out from the

world and joined ourselves to the church of God, to leave the church and return to the world, on any pretence whatever. Imperfect as the church is, I pray that I may never be suffered to forsake her communion, nor do any thing which shall exclude me from it. The place which the Lord has chosen for his residence, may I choose for mine! Let it be my lot to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; and even for evermore! Ps. 132: 13, 14. 23: 6.

6. Since it is known that sin constitutes the deformity, and holiness the beauty of the church, how great must be her obligation *to cleanse herself from the one, and seek to adorn herself with the other*. As it is her sinfulness which makes her repulsive, so it is her sanctification which renders her attractive. He, who has espoused her to himself, says, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty." Ps. 45: 10, 11. The less conformed she is to the world, and the more transformed into the image of her divine Lord, the more attractive she is in his sight. He urges her to awake, put on her beautiful garments and shake herself from the dust—to let her light shine before men—to be careful to maintain good works—to walk in wisdom towards them that are without; and especially to walk worthy of God who hath called her unto his kingdom and glory. Isa. 52: 1, 2. Matt. 5: 16. Tit. 3: 8. Col. 4: 5. 1 Thess. 2: 12.

Though the world ought not to be prejudiced against the religion of Christ on account of the imperfection of his church, and it is proper for us to

say to them, as in the text, *Look not upon us because we are black*; nevertheless we ought to blame ourselves for all our unlovely features, and to labor assiduously to improve our moral beauty, that we may become less repulsive and more attractive before our fellow-men; whose salvation from sin and ruin should be an object of which we should never lose sight. Until this be done, our influence on an unbelieving world will be comparatively small. Zion must, in a more eminent degree, arise and shine, before her light will be seen to the ends of the earth; before the Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising. Isa. 60: 1-3.

7. This subject leads us to contemplate *the glory of the church in its heavenly state*. If it is comely while on earth, though burdened and disfigured with a host of hypocrites, and the remaining depravity of its spiritual members, how exceedingly beautiful it must appear when its members shall all be righteous, and that to perfection! Then will Christ "present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." At the marriage supper of the Lamb, as it will be celebrated in the upper kingdom, there will be no traitor without, nor *within*, to disturb their fellowship. Before they are admitted to this consummate blessedness, "the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." And what remained of the body of death in believers, will now be completely destroyed. Those risings of pride and self-importance, which were so defiling and troublesome on earth, are un-

known in heaven. A blessed difference! All is now pure. The church is no longer black, but altogether comely. When the religion of Christ shall have effected the entire sanctification of all those who cordially embraced its doctrines, then its excellency will be seen to great advantage. The Redeemer will never be ashamed of his church, which he so loved as to wash her from her sins in his own blood. Nor will any of those who came out from the world, and identified their interests with those of the church, ever be ashamed of the choice they made. But they who were ashamed of Christ and his cause, while it existed on earth, will now themselves be covered with shame and everlasting contempt.

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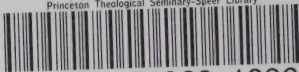
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